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TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 2694.

THE WORLD'S DESIRE.
BY
H. RIDER HAGGARD AND ANDREW LANG.

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. 1.

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THE WORLD'S DESIRE BY HAGGARD AND LANG.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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By H. Rider Haggard,

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THE
WORLD'S DESIRE

BY
H. RIDER HAGGARD
AND
ANDREW LANG.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1891.



TO

W. B. RICHMOND, A.R.A.

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THE WORLD'S DESIRE.

COME with us, ye whose hearts are set
On this, the Present to forget;
Come read the things whereof ye know
They were not, and could not be so!
The murmur of the fallen creeds,
Like winds among wind-shaken reeds
Along the banks of holy Nile,
Shall echo in your ears the while;
The fables of the North and South
Shall mingle in a modern mouth;
The fancies of the West and East
Shall flock and flit about the feast
Like doves that cooled, with waving wing,
The banquets of the Cyprian king.
Old shapes of song that do not die
Shall haunt the halls of memory,
And though the Bow shall prelude clear
Shrill as the song of Gunnar's spear,
There answer sobs from lute and lyre
That murmured of The World's Desire.

.
There lives no man but he hath seen
The World's Desire, the fairy queen.
None but hath seen her to his cost,
Not one but loves what he has lost.
None is there but hath heard her sing
Divinely through his wandering;
Not one but he hath followed far
The portent of the Bleeding Star;
Not one but he hath chanced to wake,
Dreamed of the Star and found the Snake.
Yet, through his dreams, a wandering fire.
Still, still she flits, THE WORLD'S DESIRE!

B O O K I.

CHAPTER I.

THE SILENT ISLE.

ACROSS the wide backs of the waves, beneath the mountains, and between the islands, a ship came stealing from the dark into the dusk, and from the dusk into the dawn. The ship had but one mast, one broad brown sail with a star embroidered on it in gold; her stem and stern were built high, and curved like a bird's beak; her prow was painted scarlet, and she was driven by oars as well as by the western wind.

A man stood alone on the half-deck at the bows, a man who looked always forward, through the night, and the twilight, and the clear morning. He was of no great stature, but broad-

breasted and very wide-shouldered, with many signs of strength. He had blue eyes, and dark curled locks falling beneath a red cap such as sailors wear, and over a purple cloak, fastened with a brooch of gold. There were threads of silver in his curls, and his beard was flecked with white. His whole heart was following his eyes, watching first for the blaze of the island beacons out of the darkness, and, later, for the smoke rising from the far-off hills. But he watched in vain; there was neither light nor smoke on the gray peak that lay clear against a field of yellow sky.

There was no smoke, no fire, no sound of voices, nor cry of birds. The isle was deadly still.

As they neared the coast, and neither heard nor saw a sign of life, the man's face fell. The gladness went out of his eyes, his features grew older with anxiety and doubt, and with longing for tidings of his home.

No man ever loved his home more than he,

for this was Odysseus, the son of Laertes—whom some call Ulysses—returned from his unsung second wandering. The whole world has heard the tale of his first voyage, how he was tossed for ten years on the sea after the taking of Troy, how he reached home at last, alone and disguised as a beggar; how he found violence in his house, how he slew his foes in his own hall, and won his wife again. But even in his own country he was not permitted to rest, for there was a curse upon him and a labour to be accomplished. He must wander again till he reached the land of men who had never tasted salt, nor ever heard of the salt sea. There he must sacrifice to the Sea-God, and then, at last, set his face homewards. Now he had endured that curse, he had fulfilled the prophecy, he had angered, by misadventure, the Goddess who was his friend, and after adventures that have never yet been told, he had arrived within a bowshot of Ithaca.

He came from strange countries, from the

Gates of the Sun and the White Rock, from the Passing Place of Souls and the people of Dreams.

But he found his own isle more still and strange by far. The realm of Dreams was not so dumb, the Gates of the Sun were not so still, as the shores of the familiar island beneath the rising dawn.

This story, whereof the substance was set out long ago by Rei, the instructed Egyptian priest, tells what he found there, and the tale of the last adventures of Odysseus, Laertes' son.

The ship ran on and won the well-known haven, sheltered from wind by two headlands of sheer cliff. There she sailed straight in, till the leaves of the broad olive tree at the head of the inlet were tangled in her cordage. Then the Wanderer, without once looking back, or saying one word of farewell to his crew, caught a bough of the olive tree with his hand, and swung himself ashore. Here he kneeled, and kissed the earth, and, covering his head within his cloak, he

prayed that he might find his house at peace, his wife dear and true, and his son worthy of him.

But not one word of his prayer was to be granted. The Gods give and take, but on the earth the Gods cannot restore.

When he rose from his knees he glanced back across the waters, but there was now no ship in the haven, nor any sign of a sail upon the seas.

And still the land was silent; not even the wild birds cried a welcome.

The sun was hardly up, men were scarce awake, the Wanderer said to himself; and he set a stout heart to the steep path leading up the hill, over the wolds, and across the ridge of rock that divides the two masses of the island. Up he climbed, purposing, as of old, to seek the house of his faithful servant, the swineherd, and learn from him the tidings of his home. On the brow of a hill he stopped to rest, and looked down on the house of the servant. But the strong oak palisade was broken, no smoke came

from the hole in the thatched roof, and, as he approached, the dogs did not run barking, as sheep-dogs do, at the stranger. The very path to the house was overgrown, and dumb with grass; even a dog's keen ears could scarcely have heard a footstep.

The door of the swineherd's hut was open, but all was dark within. The spiders had woven a glittering web across the empty blackness, a sign that for many days no man had entered. Then the Wanderer shouted twice, and thrice, but the only answer was an echo from the hill. He went in, hoping to find food, or perhaps a spark of fire sheltered under the dry leaves. But all was vacant and cold as death.

The Wanderer came forth into the warm sunlight, set his face to the hill again, and went on his way to the city of Ithaca.

He saw the sea from the hill-top glittering as of yore, but there were no brown sails of fisher-boats on the sea. All the land that should now

have waved with the white corn was green with tangled weeds. Half-way down the rugged path was a grove of alders, and the basin into which water flowed from the old fountain of the Nymphs. But no maidens were there with their pitchers; the basin was broken, and green with mould; the water slipped through the crevices and hurried to the sea. There were no offerings of wayfarers, rags and pebbles, by the well; and on the altar of the Nymphs the flame had long been cold. The very ashes were covered with grass, and a branch of ivy had hidden the stone of sacrifice.

On the Wanderer pressed with a heavy heart; now the high roof of his own hall and the wide fenced courts were within his sight, and he hurried forward to know the worst.

Too soon he saw that the roofs were smokeless, and all the court was deep in weeds. Where the altar of Zeus had stood in the midst of the court there was now no altar, but a great, gray mound, not of earth, but of white dust mixed

with black. Over this mound the coarse grass pricked up scantily, like thin hair on a leprosy.

Then the Wanderer shuddered, for out of the gray mound peeped the charred black bones of the dead. He drew near, and, lo! the whole heap was of nothing else than the ashes of men and women. Death had been busy here: here many people had perished of a pestilence. They had all been consumed on one funeral fire, while they who laid them there must have fled, for there was no sign of living man. The doors gaped open, and none entered, and none came forth. The house was dead, like the people who had dwelt in it.

Then the Wanderer paused where once the old hound Argos had welcomed him and had died in that welcome. There, unwelcomed, he stood, leaning on his staff. Then a sudden ray of the sun fell on something that glittered in the heap, and he touched it with the end of the staff he had in his hand. It slid jingling from

the heap; it was a bone of a fore-arm, and that which glittered on it was a half-molten ring of gold. On the gold these characters were engraved:

IKMALIOS MEIHOIEZEN.

(Icmalios made me.)

At the sight of the armlet the Wanderer fell on the earth, grovelling among the ashes of the pyre, for he knew the gold ring which he had brought from Ephyre long ago, for a gift to his wife Penelope. This was the bracelet of the bride of his youth, and here, a mockery and a terror, were those kind arms in which he had lain. Then his strength was shaken with sobbing, and his hands clutched blindly before him, and he gathered dust and cast it upon his head till the dark locks were defiled with the ashes of his dearest, and he longed to die.

There he lay, biting his hands for sorrow, and for wrath against God and Fate. There he lay while the sun in the heavens smote him, and

he knew it not; while the wind of the sunset stirred in his hair, and he stirred not. He could not even shed one tear, for this was the sorest of all the sorrows that he had known on the waves of the sea, or on land among the wars of men.

The sun fell and the ways were darkened. Slowly the eastern sky grew silver with the moon. A nightfowl's voice was heard from afar, it drew nearer; then through the shadow of the pyre the black wings fluttered into the light, and the carrion bird fixed its talons and its beak on the Wanderer's neck. Then he moved at length, tossed up an arm, and caught the bird of darkness by the neck, and broke it, and dashed it on the ground. His sick heart was mad with the little sudden pain, and he clutched for the knife in his girdle that he might slay himself, but he was unarmed. At last he rose, muttering, and stood in the moonlight, like a lion in some ruinous palace of forgotten kings. He was

faint with hunger and weak with long lamenting, as he stepped within his own doors. There he paused on that high threshold of stone where once he had sat in the disguise of a beggar, that very threshold whence, on another day, he had shot the shafts of doom among the wooers of his wife and the wasters of his home. But now his wife was dead: all his voyaging was ended here, and all his wars were vain. In the white light the house of his kingship was no more than the ghost of a home, dreadful, unfamiliar, empty of warmth and love and light. The tables were fallen here and there through the long hall; mouldering bones, from the funeral feast, and shattered cups and dishes lay in one confusion; the ivory chairs were broken, and on the walls the moonbeams glistened now and again from points of steel and blades of bronze, though many swords were dark with rust.

But there, in its gleaming case, lay one thing friendly and familiar. There lay the Bow of

Eurytus, the bow for which great Heracles had slain his own host in his halls; the dreadful bow that no mortal man but the Wanderer could bend. He was never used to carry this precious bow with him on shipboard, when he went to the wars, but treasured it at home, the memorial of a dear friend foully slain. So now, when the voices of dog, and slave, and child, and wife were mute, there yet came out of the stillness a word of welcome to the Wanderer. For this bow, which had thrilled in the grip of a god, and had scattered the shafts of the vengeance of Heracles, was wondrously made and magical. A spirit dwelt within it which knew of things to come, which boded the battle from afar, and therefore always before the slaying of men the bow sang strangely through the night. The voice of it was thin and shrill, a ringing and a singing of the string and of the bow. While the Wanderer stood and looked on his weapon, hark! the bow began to thrill! The sound was faint

at first, a thin note, but as he listened the voice of it in that silence grew clear, strong, angry, and triumphant. In his ears and to his heart it seemed that the wordless chant rang thus—

Keen and low
Doth the arrow sing
The Song of the Bow,
The sound of the string.
The shafts cry shrill:
Let us forth again,
Let us feed our fill
On the flesh of men.
Greedy and fleet
Do we fly from far,
Like the birds that meet
For the feast of war,
Till the air of fight
With our wings be stirred,
As it whirrs from the flight
Of the ravening bird.
Like the flakes that drift
On the snow-wind's breath,
Many and swift,
And winged for death—
Greedy and fleet,
Do we speed from far,
Like the birds that meet

On the bridge of war.
Fleet as ghosts that wail,
When the dart strikes true,
Do the swift shafts hail,
Till they drink warm dew.
Keen and low
Do the gray shafts sing
The Song of the Bow,
The sound of the string.

This was the message of Death, and this was the first sound that had broken the stillness of his home.

At the welcome of this music which spoke to his heart—this music he had heard so many a time—the Wanderer knew that there was war at hand. He knew that the wings of his arrows should be swift to fly, and their beaks of bronze were whetted to drink the blood of men. He put out his hand and took the bow, and tried the string, and it answered shrill as the song of the swallow.

Then at length, when he heard the bowstring twang to his touch, the fountains of his sorrow

were unsealed; tears came like soft rains on a frozen land, and the Wanderer wept.

When he had his fill of weeping, he rose, for hunger drove him—hunger that is of all things the most shameless, being stronger far than sorrow, or love, or any other desire. The Wanderer found his way through the narrow door behind the daïs, and stumbling now and again over fallen fragments of the home which he himself had built, he went to the inner, secret storehouse. Even *he* could scarcely find the door, for saplings of trees had grown up about it; yet he found it at last. Within the holy well the water was yet babbling and shining in the moonlight over the silver sands; and here, too, there was store of mouldering grain, for the house had been abundantly rich when the great plague fell upon the people while he was far away. So he found food to satisfy his hunger, after a sort, and next he gathered together out of his treasure-chest the beautiful golden armour of unhappy

Paris, son of Priam, the false love of fair Helen. These arms had been taken at the sack of Troy, and had lain long in the treasury of Menelaus in Sparta; but on a day he had given them to Odysseus, the dearest of all his guests. The Wanderer clad himself in this golden gear, and took the sword called "Euryalus's Gift," a bronze blade with a silver hilt, and a sheath of ivory, which a stranger had given him in a far-off land. Already the love of life had come back to him, now that he had eaten and drunk, and had heard the Song of the Bow, the Slayer of Men. He lived yet, and hope lived in him though his house was desolate, and his wedded wife was dead, and there was none to give him tidings of his one child, Telemachus. Even so life beat strong in his heart, and his hands would keep his head if any sea-robbers had come to the city of Ithaca and made their home there, like hawks in the forsaken nest of an eagle of the sea. So he clad himself in his armour, and

chose out two spears from a stand of lances, and cleaned them, and girt about his shoulders a quiver full of shafts, and took in hand his great bow, the Bow of Eurytus, which no other man could bend.

Then he went forth from the ruined house into the moonlight, went forth for the last time; for never again did the high roof echo to the footstep of its lord. Long has the grass grown over it, and the sea-wind wailed!

CHAPTER II.

THE VISION OF THE WORLD'S DESIRE.

THE fragrant night was clear and still, the silence scarce broken by the lapping of the waves, as the Wanderer went down from his fallen home to the city on the sea, walking warily, and watching for any light from the houses of the people. But they were all as dark as his own, many of them roofless and ruined, for, after the plague, an earthquake had smitten the city. There were gaping chasms in the road, here and there, and through rifts in the walls of the houses the moon shone strangely, making ragged shadows. At last the Wanderer reached the Temple of Athene, the Goddess of War; but the roof had fallen in, the pillars were overset, and the scent of wild thyme growing in the broken pavement rose where he

walked. Yet, as he stood by the door of the fane, where he had burned so many a sacrifice, at length he spied a light blazing from the windows of a great chapel by the sea. It was the Temple of Aphrodite, the Queen of Love, and from the open door a sweet savour of incense and a golden blaze rushed forth till they were lost in the silver of the moonshine and in the salt smell of the sea. Thither the Wanderer went slowly, for his limbs were swaying with weariness, and he was half in a dream. Yet he hid himself cunningly in the shadow of a long avenue of myrtles, for he guessed that sea-robbers were keeping revel in the forsaken shrine. But he heard no sound of singing and no tread of dancing feet within the fane of the Goddess of Love; the sacred plot of the goddess and her chapels were silent. He hearkened awhile, and watched, till at last he took courage, drew near the doors, and entered the holy place. But in the tall, bronze braziers there were no faggots burning, nor were there torches

lighted in the hands of the golden men and maids, the images that stand within the fane of Aphrodite. Yet, if he did not dream, nor take moonlight for fire, the temple was bathed in showers of gold by a splendour of flame. None might see its centre nor its fountain; it sprang neither from the altar nor the statue of the goddess, but was everywhere imminent, a glory not of this world, a fire untended and unlit. And the painted walls with the stories of the loves of men and gods, and the carven pillars and the beams, and the roof of green, were bright with flaming fire!

At this the Wanderer was afraid, knowing that an Immortal was at hand; for the comings and the goings of the gods were attended, as he had seen, by this wonderful light of unearthly fire. So he bowed his head, and hid his face as he sat by the altar in the holiest of the holy shrine, and with his right hand he grasped the horns of the altar. As he sat there, perchance

he woke, and perchance he slept. However it was, it seemed to him that soon there came a murmuring and a whispering of the myrtle leaves and laurels, and a sound in the tops of the pines, and then his face was fanned by a breath more, cold than the wind that wakes the dawn. At the touch of this breath the Wanderer shuddered and the hair on his flesh stood up, so cold was the strange wind.

There was silence; and he heard a voice, and he knew that it was the voice of no mortal, but of a goddess. For the speech of goddesses was not strange in his ears; he knew the clarion cry of Athene, the Queen of Wisdom and of War; and the winning words of Circe, the Daughter of the Sun, and the sweet song of Calypso's voice as she wove with her golden shuttle at the loom. But now the words came sweeter than the moaning of doves, more soft than sleep. So came the golden voice, whether he woke or whether he dreamed.

“Odysseus, thou knowest me not, nor am I thy lady, nor hast thou ever been my servant! Where is she, the Queen of the Air, Athene, and why comest *thou* here as a suppliant at the knees of the daughter of Dione?”

He answered nothing, but he bowed his head in deeper sorrow.

The voice spake again:

“Behold, thy house is desolate; thy hearth is cold. The wild hare breeds on thy hearthstone, and the night-bird roosts beneath thy roof-tree. Thou hast neither child nor wife nor native land, and *she* hath forsaken thee—thy Lady Athene. Many a time didst thou sacrifice to her the thighs of kine and sheep, but didst thou ever give so much as a pair of doves to *me*? Hath she left thee, as the Dawn forsook Tithonus, because there are now threads of silver in the darkness of thy hair? Is the wise goddess fickle as a nymph of the woodland or the wells? Doth she love a man only for the bloom of his youth?

Nay, I know not; but this I know, that on thee, Odysseus, old age will soon be hastening—old age that is pitiless, and ruinous, and weary, and weak—age that cometh on all men, and that is hateful to the Gods. Therefore, Odysseus, ere yet it be too late, I would bow even thee to my will, and hold thee for my thrall. For I am she who conquers all things living: Gods and beasts and men. And hast thou thought that thou only shalt escape Aphrodite? Thou that hast never loved as I would have men love; thou that hast never obeyed me for an hour, nor ever known the joy and the sorrow that are mine to give? For thou didst but endure the caresses of Circe, the Daughter of the Sun, and thou wert aweary in the arms of Calypso, and the Sea King's daughter came never to her longing. As for her who is dead, thy dear wife Penelope, thou didst love her with a loyal heart, but never with a heart of fire. Nay, she was but thy companion, thy house-wife, and the mother of thy child. She

was mingled with all thy memories of the land thou lovest, and so thou gavest her a little love. But she is dead; and thy child too is no more; and thy very country is as the ashes of a forsaken hearth where once was a camp of men. What have all thy wars and wanderings won for thee, all thy labours, and all the adventures thou hast achieved? For what didst thou seek among the living and the dead? Thou soughtest that which all men seek—thou soughtest *The World's Desire*. They find it not, nor hast thou found it, Odysseus; and thy friends are dead; thy land is dead; nothing lives but Hope. But the life that lies before thee is new, without a remnant of the old days, except for the bitterness of longing and remembrance. Out of this new life, and the unborn hours, wilt thou not give, what never before thou gavest, one hour to me, to be my servant?"

The voice, as it seemed, grew softer and came nearer, till the Wanderer heard it whisper in his very ear, and with the voice came a divine

fragrance. The breath of her who spoke seemed to touch his neck; the immortal tresses of the Goddess were mingled with the dark curls of his hair.

The voice spake again:

“Nay, Odysseus, didst thou not once give me one little hour? Fear not, for thou shalt not see me at this time, but lift thy head and look on The World's Desire!”

Then the Wanderer lifted his head, and he saw, as it were in a picture or in a mirror of bronze, the vision of a girl. She was more than mortal tall, and though still in the first flower of youth, and almost a child in years, she seemed fair as a goddess, and so beautiful that Aphrodite herself may perchance have envied this loveliness. She was slim and gracious as a young shoot of a palm tree, and her eyes were fearless and innocent as a child's. On her head she bore a shining urn of bronze, as if she were bringing water from the wells, and behind her was the foliage of a plane

tree. Then the Wanderer knew her, and saw her once again as he had seen her, when in his boyhood he had journeyed to the Court of her father, King Tyndareus. For, as he entered Sparta, and down the hill Taygetus, and as his chariot wheels flashed through the ford of Eurotas, he had met her there on her way from the river. There, in his youth, his eyes had gazed on the loveliness of Helen, and his heart had been filled with the desire of the fairest of women, and like all the princes of Achaia he had sought her hand in marriage. But Helen was given to another man, to Menelaus, Atreus' son, of an evil house, that the knees of many might be loosened in death, and that there might be a song in the ears of men in after time.

As he beheld the vision of young Helen, the Wanderer too grew young again. But as he gazed with the eyes and loved with the first love of a boy, she melted like a mist, and out of the mist came another vision. He saw himself, disguised

as a beggar, beaten and bruised, yet seated in a long hall bright with gold, while a woman bathed his head with oil. And the face of the woman was the face of the maiden, and even more beautiful, but sad with grief and with an ancient shame. Then he remembered how once he had stolen into Troy town from the camp of the Achæans, and how he had crept in a beggar's rags within the house of Priam to spy upon the Trojans, and how Helen, the fairest of women, had bathed him, and anointed him with oil, and suffered him to go in peace, all for the memory of the love that was between them of old. As he gazed, that picture faded and melted in the mist, and again he bowed his head, and kneeled by the golden altar of the Goddess, crying:

“Where beneath the sunlight dwells the golden Helen?” For now he had only one desire: to look on Helen again before he died.

Then the voice of the Goddess seemed to whisper in his ear;

"Did I not say truth, Odysseus? Wast not thou my servant for one hour, and did not Love save thee in the city of the Trojans on that night when even Wisdom was of no avail?"

He answered: "Yea, O Queen!"

"Behold, then," said the voice, "I would again have mercy and be kind to thee, for if I aid thee not thou hast no more life left among men. Home, and kindred, and native land thou hast none; and, but for me, thou must devour thine own heart and be lonely till thou diest. Therefore I breathe into thy heart a sweet forgetfulness of every sorrow, and I breathe love into thee for her who was thy first love in the beginning of thy days.

"For Helen is living yet upon the earth. And I will send thee on the quest of Helen, and thou shalt again take joy in war and wandering. Thou shalt find her in a strange land, among a strange people, in a strife of gods and men; and the wisest and bravest of men

shall sleep at last in the arms of the fairest of women. But learn this, Odysseus; thou must set thy heart on no other woman, but only on Helen.

“And I give thee a sign to know her by in a land of magic, and among women that deal in sorceries.

“On the breast of Helen a jewel shines, a great star-stone, the gift I gave her on her wedding-night when she was bride to Menelaus. From that stone fall red drops like blood, and they drip on her vestment, and there vanish, and do not stain it.

“By the Star of Love shalt thou know her; by the star shalt thou swear to her; and if thou knowest not the portent of the Bleeding Star, or if thou breakest that oath, never in this life, Odysseus, shalt thou win the golden Helen! And thine own death shall come from the water—the swiftest death—that the saying of the dead

prophet may be fulfilled. Yet first shalt thou lie in the arms of the golden Helen."

The Wanderer answered:

"Queen, how may this be, for I am alone on a sea-girt isle, and I have no ship and no companions to speed me over the great gulf of the sea?"

Then the voice answered:

"Fear not! the gods can bring to pass even greater things than these. Go from my house, and lie down to sleep in my holy ground, within the noise of the wash of the waves. There sleep, and take thy rest! Thy strength shall come back to thee, and before the setting of the new sun thou shalt be sailing on the path to The World's Desire. But first drink from the chalice on my altar. Fare thee well!"

The voice died into silence, like the dying of music. The Wanderer awoke and lifted his head, but the light had faded, and the temple was gray in the first waking of the dawn. Yet there,

on the altar where no cup had been, stood a deep chalice of gold, full of red wine to the brim. This the Wanderer lifted and drained—a draught of Nepenthe, the magic cup that puts trouble out of mind. As he drank, a wave of sweet hope went over his heart, and buried far below it the sorrow of remembrance, and the trouble of the past, and the longing desire for loves that were no more.

With a light step he went forth like a younger man, taking the two spears in his hand, and the bow upon his back, and he lay down beneath a great rock that looked toward the deep, and there he slept.

CHAPTER III.

THE SLAYING OF THE SIDONIANS.

MORNING broke in the East. A new day dawned upon the silent sea, and on the world of light and sound. The sunrise topped the hill at last, and fell upon the golden raiment of the Wanderer where he slept, making it blaze like living fire. As the sun touched him, the prow of a black ship stole swiftly round the headland, for the oarsmen drove her well with the oars. Any man who saw her would have known her to be a vessel of the merchants of Sidon—the most cunning people and the greediest of gain—for on her prow were two big-headed shapes of dwarfs, with gaping mouths and knotted limbs. Such gods as those were worshipped by the Sidonians. She was now returning from Albion,

an isle beyond the pillars of Heracles and the gates of the great sea, where much store of tin is found; and she had rich merchandise on board. On the half-deck beside the steersman was the captain, a thin, keen-eyed sailor, who looked shoreward and saw the sun blaze on the golden armour of the Wanderer. They were so far off that he could not see clearly what it was that glittered yellow, but all that glittered yellow was a lure for him, and gold drew him on as iron draws the hands of heroes. So he bade the helmsman steer straight in, for the sea was deep below the rock, and there they all saw a man lying asleep in golden armour. They whispered together, laughing silently, and then sprang ashore, taking with them a rope of twisted ox-hide, a hawser of the ship, and a strong cable of byblus, the papyrus plant. On these ropes they cast a loop and a running knot, a lasso for throwing, so that they might capture the man in safety from a distance. With these in their hands

they crept up the cliff, for their purpose was to noose the man in golden armour, and drag him on board their vessel, and carry him to the mouth of the river of Egypt, and there sell him for a slave to the King. For the Sidonians, who were greedy of everything, loved nothing better than to catch free men and women, who might be purchased, by mere force or guile, and then be sold again for gold and silver and cattle. Many kings' sons had thus been captured by them, and had seen the day of slavery in Babylon, or Tyre, or Egyptian Thebes, and had died sadly, far from the Argive land.

So the Sidonians went round warily, and, creeping in silence over the short grass and thyme towards the Wanderer, were soon as near him as a child could throw a stone. Like shepherds who seek to net a sleeping lion, they came cunningly; yet not so cunningly but that the Wanderer heard them through his dreams, and turned and sat up, looking around him half

awake. But as he woke the noose fell about his neck and over his arms, and they drew it hard, and threw him on his back. Before they could touch him he was on his feet again, crying his war-cry terribly, the cry that shook the towers of Ilium, and he rushed upon them, clutching at his sword hilt. The men who were nearest him and had hold of the rope let it fall from their hands and fled, but the others swung behind him, and dragged with all their force. If his arms had been free so that he might draw his sword, it would have gone ill with them, many as they were, for the Sidonians have no stomach for sword blades; but his arms were held in the noose. Yet they did not easily master him; but, as those who had fled came back, and they all laid hands on the rope together, they overpowered him by main force at last, and hauled him, step by step, till he stumbled on a rock and fell. Then they rushed at him, and threw themselves all upon his body, and bound him with

ropes in cunning sailor knots. But the booty was dearly won, and they did not all return alive; for he crushed one man with his knees till the breath left him, and the thigh of another he broke with a blow of his foot.

But at last his strength was spent, and they had him like a bird in a snare; so, by might and main, they bore him to their ship, and threw him down on the fore-deck of the vessel. There they mocked him, though they were half afraid; for even now he was terrible. Then they hauled up the sail again and set down to the oars. The wind blew fair for the mouth of the Nile and the slave-market of Egypt. The wind was fair, and their hearts were light, for they had been among the first of their people to deal with the wild tribes of the island Albion, and had bought tin and gold for African sea shells and rude glass beads from Egypt. And now, near the very end of their adventure, they had caught a man whose armour and whose body were worth a king's

ransom. It was a lucky voyage, they said, and the wind was fair!

The rest of the journey was long, but in well-known waters. They passed by Cephalonia and the rock of Ægilips, and wooded Zacynthus, and Samê, and of all those isles he was the lord, whom they were now selling into captivity. But he lay still, breathing heavily, and he stirred but once—that was when they neared Zacynthus. Then he strained his head round with a mighty strain, and he saw the sun go down upon the heights of rocky Ithaca, for that last time of all.

So the swift ship ran along the coast, slipping by forgotten towns. Past the Echinean isles, and the Elian shore, and pleasant Eirene they sped, and it was dusk ere they reached Dorion. Deep night had fallen when they ran by Pylos; and the light of the fires in the hall of Pisistratus, the son of Nestor the Old, shone out across the sandy sea-coast and the sea. But when they were come near Malea, the southernmost point

of land, where two seas meet, there the storm snatched them, and drove them ever southwards, beyond Crete, towards the mouth of the Nile. They scudded long before the storm-wind, losing their reckoning, and rushing by island temples that showed like ghosts through the mist, and past havens which they could not win. On they fled, and the men would gladly have lightened the ship by casting the cargo overboard; but the captain watched the hatches with a sword and two bronze-tipped spears in his hand. He would sink or swim with the ship; he would go down with his treasure, or reach Sidon, the City of Flowers, and build a white house among the palms by the waters of Bostren, and never try the sea again.

So he swore; and he would not let them cast the Wanderer overboard, as they desired, because he had brought bad luck. "He shall bring a good price in Tanis," cried the captain. And at last the storm abated, and the Sidonians took

heart, and were glad like men escaped from death; so they sacrificed and poured forth wine before the dwarf-gods on the prow of their vessel, and burned incense on their little altar. In their mirth, and to mock the Wanderer, they hung his sword and his shield against the mast, and his quiver and his bow they arrayed in the fashion of a trophy; and they mocked him, believing that he knew no word of their speech. But he knew it well, as he knew the speech of the people of Egypt; for he had seen the cities of many men, and had spoken with captains and mercenaries from many a land in the great wars.

The Sidonians, however, jibed and spoke freely before him, saying how they were bound for the rich city of Tanis, on the banks of the River of Egypt, and how the captain was minded to pay his toll to Pharaoh with the body and the armour of the Wanderer. That he might seem the comelier, and a gift more fit for a king, the sailors slackened his bonds a little, and brought

him dried meat and wine, and he ate till his strength returned to him. Then he entreated them by signs to loosen the cord that bound his legs; for indeed his limbs were dead through the strength of the bonds, and his armour was eating into his flesh. At his prayer they took some pity of him and loosened his bonds again, and he lay upon his back, moving his legs to and fro till his strength came back.

So they sailed southward ever, through smooth waters and past the islands that lie like water-lilies in the midland sea. Many a strange sight they saw: vessels bearing slaves, whose sighing might be heard above the sighing of wind and water—young men and maidens of Ionia and Achaia, stolen by slave-traders into bondage; now they would touch at the white havens of a peaceful city; and again they would watch a smoke on the sea-line all day, rising black into the heavens; but by nightfall the smoke would change to a great roaring fire from the beacons of a be-

leaguered island town; the fire would blaze on the masts of the ships of the besiegers, and show blood-red on their sails, and glitter on the gilded shields that lined the bulwarks of the ships. But the Sidonians sped on till, one night, they anchored off a little isle that lies over against the mouth of the Nile. Beneath this isle they moored the ship, and slept, most of them, ashore.

Then the Wanderer began to plot a way to escape, though the enterprise seemed desperate enough. He was lying in the darkness of the hold, sleepless and sore with his bonds, while his guard watched under an awning in the moonlight on the deck. They dreamed so little of his escaping that they visited him only by watches, now and again; and, as it chanced, the man whose turn it was to see that all was well fell asleep. Many a thought went through the prisoner's mind, and now it seemed to him that the vision of the Goddess was only a vision of

sleep, which came, as they said, through the false Gates of Ivory, and not through the Gates of Horn. So he was to live in slavery after all, a king no longer, but a captive, toiling in the Egyptian mines of Sinai, or a soldier at a palace gate, till he died. Thus he brooded, till out of the stillness came a thin, faint, thrilling sound from the bow that hung against the mast over his head, the bow that he never thought to string again. There was a noise of a singing of the bow and of the string, and the wordless song shaped itself thus in the heart of the Wanderer:

Lo! the hour is nigh
And the time to smite,
When the foe shall fly
From the arrow's flight!
Let the bronze bite deep!
Let the war-birds fly
Upon them that sleep
And are ripe to die!
Shrill and low
Do the gray shafts sing
The Song of the Bow,
The sound of the string!

Then the low music died into the silence, and the Wanderer knew that the next sun would not set on the day of slavery, and that his revenge was near. His bonds would be no barrier to his vengeance; they would break like burnt tow, he knew, in the fire of his anger. Long since, in his old days of wandering, Calypso, his love, had taught him in the summer leisure of her sea-girt isle how to tie knots that no man could untie, and to undo all the knots that men can bind. He remembered this lesson in the night when the bow sang of war. So he thought no more of sleeping, but cunningly and swiftly unknotted all the cords and the bonds which bound him to a bar of iron in the hold. He might have escaped now, perhaps, if he had stolen on deck without waking the guards, dived thence and swam under water towards the island, where he might have hidden himself in the bush. But he desired revenge no less than freedom, and had set his heart on coming in a ship of

his own, and with all the great treasure of the Sidonians, before the Egyptian King.

With this in his mind, he did not throw off the cords, but let them lie on his arms and legs and about his body, as if they were still tied fast. But he fought against sleep, lest in moving when he woke he might reveal the trick, and be bound again. So he lay and waited, and in the morning the sailors came on board, and mocked at him again. In his mirth one of the men took a dish of meat and of lentils, and set it a little out of the Wanderer's reach as he lay bound, and said in the Phoenician tongue:

"Mighty lord, art thou some god of Javan" (for so the Sidonians called the Achæans), "and wilt thou deign to taste our sacrifice? Is not the savour sweet in the nostrils of my lord? Why will he not put forth his hand to touch our offering?"

Then the heart of Odysseus muttered sullenly within him, in wrath at the insolence of the

man. But he constrained himself and smiled, and said:

“Wilt thou not bring the mess a very little nearer, my friend, that I may smell the sweet incense of the sacrifice?”

They were amazed when they heard him speak in their own tongue; but he who held the dish brought it near, like a man that angers a dog, now offering the meat, and now taking it away.

So soon as the man was within reach, the Wanderer sprang out, the loosened bonds falling at his feet, and smote the sailor beneath the ear with his clenched fist. The blow was so fierce, for all his anger went into it, that it crushed the bone, and drove the man against the mast of the ship so that the strong mast shook. Where he fell, there he lay, his feet kicking the floor of the hold in his death-pain.

Then the Wanderer snatched from the mast his bow and his short sword, slung the quiver

about his shoulders, and ran on to the raised decking of the prow.

The bulwarks of the deck were high, and the vessel was narrow, and before the sailors could stir for amazement the Wanderer had taken his stand behind the little altar and the dwarf-gods. Here he stood with an arrow on the string, and the bow drawn to his ear, looking about him terribly.

Now panic and dread came on the Sidonians when they saw him standing thus, and one of the sailors cried:

“Alas! what god have we taken and bound? Our ship may not contain him. Surely he is Resef Mikal, the God of the Bow, whom they of Javan call Apollo. Nay, let us land him on the isle and come not to blows with him, but entreat his mercy, lest he rouse the waves and the winds against us.”

But the captain of the ship of the Sidonians cried;

“Not so, ye knaves! Have at him, for he is no god, but a mortal man; and his armour is worth many a yoke of oxen!”

Then he bade some of them climb the decking at the further end of the ship, and throw spears at him thence; and he called others to bring up one of the long spears and charge him with that. Now these were huge pikes, that were wielded by five or six men at once, and no armour could withstand them; they were used in the fights to drive back boarders, and to ward off attacks on ships which were beached on shore in the sieges of towns.

The men whom the captain appointed little liked the task, for the long spears were laid on tressels along the bulwarks, and to reach them and unship them it was needful to come within range of the bow. But the sailors on the further deck threw all their spears at once, while five men leaped on the deck where the Wanderer stood. He loosed the bowstring and the shaft

sped on its way; again he drew and loosed, and now two of them had fallen beneath his arrows, and one was struck by a chance blow from a spear thrown from the further deck, and the other two leaped back into the hold.

Then the Wanderer shouted from the high decking of the prow in the speech of the Sidonians:

“Ye dogs, ye have sailed on your latest seafaring, and never again shall ye bring the hour of slavery on any man.”

So he cried, and the sailors gathered together in the hold, and took counsel how they should deal with him. But meanwhile the bow was not silent, and of those on the hinder deck who were casting spears, one dropped and the others quickly fled to their fellows below, for on the deck they had no cover.

The sun was now well risen, and shone on the Wanderer's golden mail, as he stood alone on the decking, with his bow drawn. The sun

shone, there was silence, the ship swung to her anchor; and still he waited, looking down, his arrow pointing at the level of the deck to shoot at the first head which rose above the planking. Suddenly there came a rush of men on to the further decking, and certain of them tore the shield that lined the bulwarks from their pins, and threw them down to those who were below, while others cast a shower of spears at the Wanderer. Some of the spears he avoided; others leaped back from his mail; others stood fast in the altar and in the bodies of the dwarf-gods; while he answered with an arrow that did not miss its aim. But his eyes were always watching most keenly the hatches nearest him, whence a gang-way ran down to the lower part of the ship, where the oarsmen sat; for only thence could they make a rush on him. As he watched and drew an arrow from the quiver on his shoulder, he felt, as it were, a shadow between him and the deck. He glanced up quickly,

and there, on the yard above his head, a man, who had climbed the mast from behind, was creeping down to drop on him from above. Then the Wanderer snatched a short spear and cast it at the man. The spear sped quicker than a thought, and pinned his two hands to the yard so that he hung there helpless, shrieking to his friends. But the arrows of the Wanderer kept raining on the men who stood on the further deck, and presently some of them, too, leaped down in terror, crying that he was a god and not a man, while others threw themselves into the sea, and swam for the island.

Then the Wanderer himself waited no longer, seeing them all amazed, but he drew his sword and leaped down among them with a cry like a sea-eagle swooping on seamews in the crevice of a rock. To right and left he smote with the short sword, making a havoc and sparing none, for the sword ravened in his hand. And some fell over the benches and oars, but such of the

sailors as could flee rushed up the gangway into the further deck, and thence sprang overboard, while those who had not the luck to flee fell where they stood, and scarcely struck a blow. Only the captain of the ship, knowing that all was lost, turned and threw a spear in the Wanderer's face. But he watched the flash of the bronze and stooped his head, so that the spear struck only the golden helm and pierced it through, but scarcely grazed his head. Now the Wanderer sprang on the Sidonian captain, and smote him with the flat of his sword so that he fell senseless on the deck, and then he bound him hand and foot with cords as he himself had been bound, and made him fast to the iron bar in the hold. Next he gathered up the dead in his mighty arms, and set them against the bulwarks of the fore-deck—harvesting the fruits of War. Above the deck the man who had crept along the yard was hanging by his two hands which the spear had pinned together to the yard.

“Art thou there, friend?” cried the Wanderer, mocking him. “Hast thou chosen to stay with me rather than go with thy friends, or seek new service? Nay, then, as thou art so staunch, abide there and keep a good look-out for the river mouth and the market where thou shalt sell me for a great price.” So he spoke, but the man was already dead of pain and fear. Then the Wanderer unbuckled his golden armour, which clanged upon the deck, and drew fresh water from the hold to cleanse himself, for he was stained like a lion that has devoured an ox. Next, with a golden comb he combed his long dark curls, and he gathered his arrows out of the bodies of the dead, and out of the thwarts and the sides of the ship, cleansed them, and laid them back in the quiver. When all this was ended he put on his armour again; but strong as he was, he could not tear the spear from the helm without breaking the gold; so he snapped the shaft and put on the helmet with the point

of the javelin still fixed firm in the crest, as Fate would have it so, and this was the beginning of his sorrows. Next he ate meat and bread, and drank wine, and poured forth some of the wine before his gods. Lastly he dragged up the heavy stone with which the ship was moored, a stone heavier far, they say, than two other men could lift. He took the tiller in his hand; the steady north wind, the Etesian wind, kept blowing in the sails, and he steered straight southward for the mouths of the Nile.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLOOD-RED SEA.

A HARD fight it had been and a long, and the Wanderer was weary. He took the tiller of the ship in his hand, and steered for the South and for the noonday sun, which was now at his highest in the heavens. But suddenly the bright light of the sky was darkened and the air was filled with the rush, and the murmur, and the winnowing of innumerable wings. It was as if all the birds that have their homes and seek their food in the great salt marsh of Cayster had risen from the South and had flown over sea in one hour, for the heaven was darkened with their flight, and loud with the call of cranes and the whistling cry of the wild ducks. So dark was the thick mass of flying fowl, that a flight of swans

shone snowy against the black cloud of their wings. At the view of them the Wanderer caught his bow eagerly into his hand and set an arrow on the string, and, taking a careful aim at the white wedge of birds, he shot a wild swan through the breast as it swept high over the mast. Then, with all the speed of its rush, the wild white swan flashed down like lightning into the sea behind the ship. The Wanderer watched its fall, when, lo! the water where the dead swan fell splashed up as red as blood and all afoam! The long silver wings and snowy plumage floated on the surface flecked with blood-red stains, and the Wanderer marvelled as he bent over the bulwarks and gazed steadily upon the sea. Then he saw that the wide sea round the ship was covered, as far as the eye could reach, as it were with a blood-red scum. Hither and thither the red stain was tossed like foam, yet beneath, where the deep wave divided, the Wanderer saw that the streams of the sea

were gray and green below the crimson dye. As he watched he saw, too, that the red froth was drifted always onward from the South and from the mouth of the River of Egypt, for behind the wake of the ship it was most red of all, though he had not marked it while the battle raged. But in front the colour grew thin, as if the stain that the river washed down was all but spent. In his heart the Wanderer thought, as any man must have deemed, that on the banks of the River of Egypt there had been some battle of great nations, and that the War God had raged furiously, wherefore the holy river as it ran forth stained all the sacred sea. Where war was, there was his home, no other home had he now, and all the more eagerly he steered right on to see what the Gods would send him. The flight of birds was over and past; it was two hours after noon, the light was high in the heaven, when, as he gazed, another shadow fell on him, for the sun in mid-heaven grew small, and red

as blood. Slowly a mist rose up over it from the South, a mist that was thin but as black as night. Beyond, to the southward, there was a bank of cloud like a mountain wall, steep, and polished, and black, tipped along the ragged crest with fire, and opening ever and again with flashes of intolerable splendour, while the bases were scrawled over with lightning like a written scroll. Never had the Wanderer in all his voyaging on the sea and on the great River Oceanus that girdles the earth, and severs the dead from the living men—never had he beheld such a darkness. Presently he came as it were within the jaws of it, dark as a wolf's mouth, so dark that he might not see the corpses on the deck, nor the mast, nor the dead man swinging from the yard, nor the captain of the Phœnicians who groaned aloud below, praying to his gods. But in the wake of the ship there was one break of clear blue sky on the horizon, in which the little isle where he had slain the Sidonians might

be discerned far off, as bright and white as ivory.

Now, though he knew it not, the gates of his own world were closing behind the Wanderer for ever. To the North, whence he came, lay the clear sky, and the sunny capes and isles, and the airy mountains of the Argive lands, white with the temples of familiar Gods. But in face of him, to the South, whither he went, was a cloud of darkness and a land of darkness itself. There were things to befall more marvellous than are told in any tale; there was to be a war of the peoples, and of the Gods, the True Gods and the False, and there he should find the last embraces of Love, the False Love and the True.

Foreboding somewhat of the perils that lay in front, the Wanderer was tempted to shift his course and sail back to the sunlight. But he was one that had never turned his hand from the plough, nor his foot from the path, and he thought that now his path was fore-ordained.

So he lashed the tiller with a rope, and groped his way with his hands along the deck till he reached the altar of the dwarf-gods, where the embers of the sacrifice still were glowing faintly. Then with his sword he cut some spear-shafts and broken arrows into white chips, and with them he filled a little brazier, and taking the seed of fire from the altar set light to it from beneath. Presently the wood blazed up through the noonday night, and the fire flickered and flared on the faces of the dead men that lay about the deck, rolling to larboard and to starboard, as the vessel lurched, and the flame shone red on the golden armour of the Wanderer.

Of all his voyages this was the strangest seafaring, he cruising alone, with a company of the dead, deep into a darkness without measure or bound, to a land that might not be descried. Strange gusts of sudden wind blew him hither and thither. The breeze would rise in a moment from any quarter, and die as suddenly as it rose,

and another wind would chase it over the chopping seas. He knew not if he sailed South or North, he knew not how time passed, for there was no sight of the sun. It was night without a dawn. Yet his heart was glad, as if he had been a boy again, for the old sorrows were forgotten, so potent was the draught of the chalice of the Goddess, and so keen was the delight of battle.

“Endure, my heart,” he cried, as often he had cried before, “a worse thing than this thou hast endured,” and he caught up a lyre of the dead Sidonians, and sang:—

Though the light of the sun be hidden,
Though his race be run,
Though we sail in a sea forbidden
To the golden sun;
Though we wander alone, unknowing,—
Oh, heart of mine,—
The path of the strange sea-going,
On the blood-red brine;
Yet endure! We shall not be shaken
By things worse than these;
We have 'scaped, when our friends were taken,
On the unsailed seas;

Worse deaths have we faced and fled from,
In the Cyclops' den,
When the floor of his cave ran red from
The blood of men;
Worse griefs have we known undaunted,
Worse fates have fled;
When the Isle that our long love haunted
Lay waste and dead!

So he was chanting when he descried, faint
and far off, a red glow cast up along the dark-
ness like sunset on the sky of the under-world.
For this light he steered, and soon he saw two
tall pillars of flame blazing beside each other,
with a narrow space of night between them. He
helmed the ship towards these, and when he
came near them they were like two mighty moun-
tains of wood burning far into heaven, and each
was lofty as the pyre that blazes over men slain
in some red war, and each pile roared and flared
above a steep crag of smooth black basalt, and
between the burning mounds of fire lay the flame-
flecked water of a haven.

The ship neared the haven and the Wanderer saw, moving like fireflies through the night, the lanterns in the prows of boats, and from one of the boats a sailor hailed him in the speech of the people of Egypt, asking him if he desired a pilot.

"Yea," he shouted. The boat drew near, and the pilot came aboard, a torch in his hand; but when his eyes fell on the dead men in the ship, and the horror hanging from the yard, and the captain bound to the iron bar, and above all, on the golden armour of the hero, and on the spear-point fast in his helm, and on his terrible face, he shrank back in dread, as if the God Osiris himself, in the Ship of Death, had reached the harbour. But the Wanderer bade him have no fear, telling him that he came with much wealth and with a great gift for the Pharaoh. The pilot, therefore, plucked up heart, and took the helm, and between the two great hills of blazing fire the vessel glided into the smooth

waters of the River of Egypt, the flames glittering on the Wanderer's mail as he stood by the mast and chanted the Song of the Bow.

Then, by the counsel of the pilot, the vessel was steered up the river towards the Temple of Heracles in Tanis, where there is a sanctuary for strangers, and where no man may harm them. But first, the dead Sidonians were cast overboard into the great river, for the dead bodies of men are an abomination to the Egyptians. And as each body struck the water the Wanderer saw a hateful sight, for the face of the river was lashed into foam by the sudden leaping and rushing of huge four-footed fish, or so the Wanderer deemed them. The sound of the heavy plunging of the great water-beasts, as they darted forth on the prey, smiting at each other with their tails, and the gnashing of their jaws when they bit too eagerly, and only harmed the air, and the leap of a greedy sharp snout from the waves, even before the dead man cast from the ship had

quite touched the water—these things were horrible to see and hear through the blackness and by the firelight. A River of Death it seemed, haunted by the horrors that are said to prey upon the souls and bodies of the Dead. For the first time the heart of the Wanderer died within him, at the horror of the darkness and of this dread river and of the water-beasts that dwelt within it. Then he remembered how the birds had fled in terror from this place, and he be-thought him of the blood-red sea.

When the dead men were all cast overboard and the river was once more still, the Wanderer spoke, sick at heart, and inquired of the pilot why the sea had run so red, and whether war was in the land, and why there was night over all that country. The fellow answered that there was no war, but peace, yet the land was strangely plagued with frogs and locusts and lice in all their coasts, the sacred River Sihor running red for three whole days, and now, at last, for this

the third day, darkness over all the world. But as to the cause of these curses the pilot knew nothing, being a plain man. Only the story went among the people that the Gods were angry with Khem (as they call Egypt), which indeed was easy to see, for those things could come only from the Gods. But why they were angered the pilot knew not, still it was commonly thought that the Divine Hathor, the Goddess of Love, was wrath because of the worship given in Tanis to one they called THE STRANGE HATHOR, a goddess or a woman of wonderful beauty, whose temple was in Tanis. Concerning her the pilot said that many years ago, some thirty years, she had first appeared in the country, coming none knew whence, and had been worshipped in Tanis, and had again departed as mysteriously as she came. But now she had once more chosen to appear visible to men, strangely, and to dwell in her temple; and the men who beheld her could do nothing but worship her for her beauty. Whether

she was a mortal woman or a goddess the pilot did not know, only he thought that she who dwells in Atarhechis, Hathor of Khem, the Queen of Love, was angry with the strange Hathor, and had sent the darkness and the plagues to punish them who worshipped her. The people of the seaboard also murmured that it would be well to pray the Strange Hathor to depart out of their coasts, if she were a goddess; and if she were a woman to stone her with stones. But the people of Tanis vowed that they would rather die, one and all, than do aught but adore the incomparable beauty of their strange Goddess. Others again, held that two wizards, leaders of certain slaves of a strange race, wanderers from the desert, settled in Tanis, whom they called the Apura, caused all these sorrows by art-magic. As if, forsooth, said the pilot, those barbarian slaves were more powerful than all the priests of Egypt. But for his part, the pilot knew nothing, only that if the Divine Hathor were angry with

the people of Tanis it was hard that she must plague all the land of Khem.

So the pilot murmured, and his tale was none of the shortest; but even as he spoke the darkness grew less dark and the cloud lifted a little so that the shores of the river might be seen in a green light like the light of Hades, and presently the night was rolled up like a veil, and it was living noonday in the land of Khem. Then all the noise of life broke forth in one moment, the kine lowing, the wind swaying the feathery palms, the fish splashing in the stream, men crying to each other from the river banks, and the voice of multitudes of people in every red temple praising Ra, their great God, whose dwelling is the sun. The Wanderer, too, praised his own Gods, and gave thanks to Apollo, and to Helios Hyperion, and to Aphrodite. And in the end the pilot brought the ship to the quay of a great city, and there a crew of oarsmen was hired, and they sped rejoicing in the sunlight, through

a canal dug by the hands of men, to Tanis and the Sanctuary of Heracles, the Safety of Strangers. There the ship was moored, there the Wanderer rested, having a good welcome from the shaven priests of the temple.

CHAPTER V.

MERIAMUN THE QUEEN.

STRANGE news flies fast. It was not long before the Pharaoh, who then was with his Court in Tanis, the newly rebuilded city, heard how there had come to Khem a man like a god, wearing golden armour, and cruising alone in a ship of the dead. In these years the white barbarians of the sea and of the isles were wont to land in Egypt, to ravage the fields, carry women captive, and fly again in their ships. But not one of them had dared to sail in the armour of the Aquaiusha, as the Egyptians named the Achæans, right up the river to the city of Pharaoh. The King, therefore, was amazed at the story, and when he heard that the stranger had taken sanctuary in the Temple of Heracles, he sent in-

stantly for his chief counsellor. This was his Master Builder, who bore a high title in the land, an ancient priest named Rei. He had served through the long reign of the King's father, the divine Rameses the Second, and he was beloved both of Meneptah and of Meriamun his Queen. Him the King charged to visit the Sanctuary and bring the stranger before him. So Rei called for his mule, and rode down to the Temple of Heracles beyond the walls.

When Rei came thither, a priest went before him and led him to the chamber where the warrior chanced to be eating the lily bread of the land, and drinking the wine of the Delta. He rose as Rei entered, and he was still clad in his golden armour, for as yet he had not any change of raiment. Beside him, on a bronze tripod, lay his helmet, the Achæan helmet, with its two horns and with the bronze spear-point still fast in the gold.

The eyes of Rei the Priest fell on the helmet,

and he gazed so strangely at it that he scarcely heard the Wanderer's salutation. At length he answered courteously, but always his eyes wandered back to the broken spear-point.

"Is this thine, my son?" he asked, taking it in his hand, while his voice trembled.

"It is my own," said the Wanderer, "though the spear-head in it was lent me of late, in return for arrows not a few and certain sword-strokes," and he smiled.

The ancient priest bade the Temple servants retire, and as they went they heard him murmuring a prayer.

"The Dead spoke truth," he muttered, still gazing from the helmet in his hand to the Wanderer; "ay, the Dead speak seldom, but they never lie."

"My son, thou hast eaten and drunk," then said Rei the Priest and Master Builder, "and may an old man ask whence thou camest, where is thy native city, and who are thy parents?"

"I come from Alybas," answered the Wanderer, for his own name was too widely known, and he loved an artful tale. "I come from Alybas; I am the son of Apheidas, son of Polypemon, and my own name is Eperitus."

"And wherefore comest thou here alone in a ship of dead men, and with more treasure than a king's ransom?"

"It was men of Sidon who laboured and died for all that cargo," said the Wanderer; "they voyaged far for it, and toiled hard, but they lost it in an hour. For they were not content with what they had, but made me a prisoner as I lay asleep on the coast of Crete. But the Gods gave me the upper hand of them, and I bring their captain, and much white metal and many swords and cups and beautiful woven stuffs, as a gift to your King. And for thy courtesy, come with me, and choose a gift for thyself."

Then he led the old man to the treasure-chambers of the Temple, which was rich in the

offerings of many travellers, gold and turquoise and frankincense from Sinai and Punt, great horns of carved ivory from the unknown East and the South; bowls and baths of silver from the Khita, who were the allies of Egypt. But amidst all the wealth, the stranger's cargo made a goodly show and the old priest's eyes glittered as he looked at it.

"Take thy choice, I pray thee," said the Wanderer, "the spoils of foemen are the share of friends."

The priest would have refused, but the Wanderer saw that he looked ever at a bowl of transparent amber, from the far-off Northern seas, that was embossed with curious figures of men and gods, and huge fishes, such as are unknown in the Midland waters. The Wanderer put it into the hands of Rei.

"Thou shalt keep this," he said, "and pledge me in wine from it when I am gone, in memory of a friend and a guest."

Rei took the bowl, and thanked him, holding it up to the light to admire the golden colour.

"We are always children," he said, smiling gravely. "See an old child whom thou hast made happy with a toy. But we are men too soon again; the King bids thee come with me before him. And, my son, if thou wouldst please me more than by any gift, I pray thee pluck that spear-head from thy helmet before thou comest into the presence of the Queen."

"Pardon me," said the Wanderer. "I would not harm my helmet by tearing it roughly out, and I have no smith's tools here. The spear-point, my father, is a witness to the truth of my tale, and for one day more, or two, I must wear it."

Rei sighed, bowed his head, folded his hands, and prayed to his God Amen, saying:

"O Amen, in whose hand is the end of a matter, lighten the burden of these sorrows, and let the vision be easy of accomplishment, and I

pray thee, O Amen, let thy hand be light on thy daughter Meriamun, the Lady of Khem."

Then the old man led the Wanderer out, and bade the priests make ready a chariot for him; and so they went through Tanis to the Court of Menepthah. Behind them followed the priests, carrying gifts that the Wanderer had chosen from the treasures of the Sidonians, and the miserable captain of the Sidonians was dragged along after them, bound to the hinder part of a chariot. Through the gazing crowd they all passed on to the Hall of Audience, where, between the great pillars, sat Pharaoh on his golden throne. Beside him, at his right hand, was Meriamun, the beautiful Queen, who looked at the priests with weary eyes, as if at a matter in which she had no concern. They came in and beat the earth with their brows before the King. First came the officers, leading the captain of the Sidonians for a gift to Pharaoh, and the King smiled graciously and accepted the slave.

Then came others, bearing the cups of gold fashioned like the heads of lions and rams, and the swords with pictures of wars and huntings etched on their blades in many-coloured gold, and the necklets of amber from the North, which the Wanderer had chosen as gifts for Pharaoh's Queen and Pharaoh. He had silks, too, embroidered in gold, the needlework of Sidonian women, and all these the Queen Meriamun touched to show her acceptance of them, and smiled graciously and wearily. But the covetous Sidonian groaned, when he saw his wealth departing from him, the gains for which he had hazarded his life in unsailed seas. Lastly, Pharaoh bade them lead the Wanderer in before his presence, and he came unhelmeted, in all his splendour, the goodliest man that had ever been seen in Khem. He was of no great height, but very great of girth, and of strength unmatched, and with the face of one who had seen what few have seen and lived. The beauty of youth was

gone from him, but his face had the comeliness of a warrior tried on sea and land; the eyes were of a valour invincible, and no woman could see him but she longed to be his love.

As he entered murmurs of amazement passed over all the company, and all eyes were fixed on him, save only the weary and wandering eyes of the listless Meriamun. But when she chanced to lift her face, and gaze on him, they who watch the looks of kings and queens saw her turn gray as the dead, and clutch with her hand at her side. Pharaoh himself saw this though he was not quick to mark what passed, and he asked her if anything ailed her, but she answered:—

“Nay, only methinks the air is sick with heat and perfume. Greet thou this stranger.” But beneath her robe her fingers were fretting all the while at the golden fringes of her throne.

“Welcome, thou Wanderer,” cried Pharaoh, in a deep and heavy voice, “welcome! By what

name art thou named, and where dwell thy people, and what is thy native land?"

Bowing low before Pharaoh, the Wanderer answered, with a feigned tale, that his name was Eperitus of Alybas, the son of Apheidas. The rest of the story, and how he had been taken by the Sidonians, and how he had smitten them on the seas, he told as he had told it to Rei. And he displayed his helmet with the spear-point fast in it. But when she saw this Meriamun rose to her feet as if she would be gone, and then fell back into her seat even paler than before.

"The Queen, help the Queen, she faints," cried Rei the Priest, whose eyes had never left her face. One of her ladies, a beautiful woman, ran to her, knelt before her, and chafed her hands, till she came to herself, and sat up with angry eyes.

"Let be!" she said, "and let the slave who tends the incense be beaten on the feet. Nay,

I will remain here, I will not to my chamber. Let be!" and her lady drew back afraid.

Then Pharaoh bade men lead the Sidonian out, and slay him in the market-place for his treachery; but the man, whose name was Kurri, threw himself at the feet of the Wanderer, praying for his life. The Wanderer was merciful, when the rage of battle was over, and his blood was cool.

"A boon, O Pharaoh Menephtah," he cried. "Spare me this man! He saved my own life when the crew would have cast me overboard. Let me pay my debt."

"Let him be spared, as thou wilt have it so," spoke Pharaoh, "but revenge dogs the feet of foolish mercy, and many debts are paid ere all is done."

Thus it chanced that Kurri was given to Meriamun to be her jeweller and to work for her in gold and silver. To the Wanderer was allotted a chamber in the Royal Palace, for the

Pharaoh trusted that he would be a leader of his Guard, and took great pleasure in his beauty and his strength.

As he left the Hall of Audience with Rei, the Queen Meriamun lifted her eyes again, and looked on him long, and her ivory face flushed rosy, like the ivory that the Sidonians dye red for the trappings of the horses of kings. But the Wanderer marked both the sudden fear and the blush of Meriamun, and, beautiful as she was, he liked it ill, and his heart foreboded evil. When he was alone with Rei, therefore, he spoke to him of this, and prayed the old man to tell him if he could guess at all the meaning of the Queen.

“For to me,” he said, “it was as if the Lady knew my face, and even as if she feared it; but I never saw her like in all my wanderings. Beautiful she is, and yet—but it is ill speaking in their own land of kings and queens!”

At first, when the Wanderer spoke thus, Rei

put it by, smiling. But the Wanderer, seeing that he was troubled, and remembering how he had prayed him to pluck the spear-point from his helmet, pressed him hard with questions. Thus, partly out of weariness, and partly for love of him, and also because a secret had long been burning in his heart, the old man took the Wanderer into his own room in the Palace, and there he told him all the story of Meriamun the Queen.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY OF MERIAMUN.

REI, the Priest of Amen, the Master Builder, began his story unwillingly enough, and slowly, but soon he took pleasure in telling it as old men do, and in sharing the burden of a secret.

"The Queen is fair," he said; "thou hast seen no fairer in all thy voyagings?"

"She is fair indeed," answered the Wanderer. "I pray that she be well-mated and happy on her throne?"

"That is what I will tell thee of, though my life may be the price of the tale," said Rei. "But a lighter heart is well worth an old man's cheap risk, and thou may'st help me and her, when thou knowest all. Pharaoh Menepthah, her lord, the King, is the son of the divine Rameses,

the ever-living Pharaoh, child of the Sun, who dwelleth in Osiris."

"Thou meanest that he is dead?" asked the Wanderer.

"He dwelleth with Osiris," said the Priest, "and the Queen Meriamun was his daughter by another bed."

"A brother wed a sister!" exclaimed the Wanderer.

"It is the custom of our Royal House, from the days of the Timeless Kings, the children of Horus. An old custom."

"The ways of his hosts are good in the eyes of a stranger," said the Wanderer, courteously.

"It is an old custom, and a sacred," said Rei, "but women, the custom-makers, are often custom-breakers. And of all women, Meriamun least loves to be obedient, even to the dead. And yet she has obeyed, and it came about thus. Her brother Menepthah—who now is Pharaoh—the Prince of Kush while her divine

father lived, had many half-sisters, but Meriamun was the fairest of them all. She is beautiful, a Moon-child the common people called her, and wise, and she does not know the face of fear. And thus it chanced that she learned, what even our Royal women rarely learn, all the ancient secret wisdom of this ancient land. Except Queen Taia of old, no woman has known what Meriamun knows, what I have taught her—I and another counsellor.”

He paused here, and his mind seemed to turn on unhappy things.

“I have taught her from her childhood,” he went on—“would that I had been her only familiar—and, after her divine father and mother, she loved me more than any, for she loved few. But of all whom she did not love she loved her Royal brother least. He is slow of speech, and she is quick. She is fearless and he has no heart for war. From her childhood she scorned him, mocked him, and mastered him with her

tongue. She even learned to excel him in the chariot races—therefore it was that the King his father made him but a General of the Foot Soldiers—and in guessing riddles, which our people love, she delighted to conquer him. The victory was easy enough, for the divine Prince is heavy-witted; but Meriamun was never tired of girding at him. Plainly, even as a little child she grudged that he should come to wield the scourge of power, and wear the double crown, while she should live in idleness, and hunger for command.”

“It is strange, then, that of all his sisters, if one must be Queen, he should have chosen her,” said the Wanderer.

“Strange, and it happened strangely. The Prince’s father, the divine Rameses, had willed the marriage. The Prince hated it no less than Meriamun, but the will of a father is the will of the Gods. In one sport the divine Prince excelled, in the Game of Pieces, an old game in

Khem. It is no pastime for women, but even at this Meriamun was determined to master her brother. She bade me carve her a new set of the pieces fashioned with the heads of cats, and shaped from the hard wood of Azebi.* I carved them with my own hands, and night by night she played with me, who have some name for skill at the sport.

“One sunset it chanced that her brother came in from hunting the lion in the Libyan hills. He was in an evil humour, for he had found no lions, and he caused the huntsmen to be stretched out, and beaten with rods. Then he called for wine, and drank deep at the Palace gate, and the deeper he drank the darker grew his humour.

“He was going to his own Court in the Palace, striking with a whip at his hounds, when he chanced to turn and see Meriamun. She was sitting where those three great palm-trees are,

* Cyprus.

and was playing at pieces with me in the cool of the day. There she sat in the shadow, clad in white and purple, and with the red gold of the snake of royalty in the blackness of her hair. There she sat as beautiful as the Hathor, the Queen of Love; or as the Lady Isis when she played at pieces in Amenti with the ancient King. Nay, an old man may say it, there never was but one woman more fair than Meriamun, if a woman she be, she whom our people call the *Strange Hathor*."

Now the Wanderer bethought him of the tale of the pilot, but he said nothing, and Rei went on.

"The Prince saw her, and his anger sought for something new to break itself on. Up he came, and I rose before him, and bowed myself. But Meriamun fell indolently back in her chair of ivory, and with a sweep of her slim hand she disordered the pieces, and bade her waiting woman, the lady Hataska, gather up the board,

and carry all away. But Hataska's eyes were secretly watching the Prince.

“‘Greeting, Princess, our Royal sister,’ said Menepthah. ‘What art thou doing with these?’ and he pointed with his chariot whip at the cat-headed pieces. ‘This is no woman’s game, these pieces are not soft hearts of men to be moved on the board by love. This game needs wit! Get thee to thy broidery, for there thou may’st excel.’

“‘Greeting, Prince, our Royal brother,’ said Meriamun. ‘I laugh to hear thee speak of a game that needs wit. Thy hunting has not prospered, so get thee to the banquet board, for there, I hear, the Gods have granted thee to excel.’

“‘It is little to say,’ answered the Prince, throwing himself into a chair whence I had risen, ‘it is little to say, but at the game of pieces I have wit enough to give thee a temple, a priest

and five bowmen, and yet win,'—for these, O Wanderer, are the names of some of the pieces.

“‘I take the challenge,’ cried Meriamun, for now she had brought him where she wanted; ‘but I will take no odds. Here is my wager. I will play thee three games, and stake the sacred circlet upon my brow, against the Royal uraeus on thine, and the winner shall wear both.’

“‘Nay, nay, Lady,’ I was bold to say, ‘this were too high a stake.’

“‘High or low, I accept the wager,’ answered the Prince. ‘This sister of mine has mocked me too long. She shall find that her woman’s wit cannot match me at my own game, and that my father’s son, the Royal Prince of Kush and the Pharaoh who shall be, is more than the equal of a girl. I hold thy wage, Meriamun!’

“‘Go then, Prince,’ she cried, ‘and after sunset meet me in my antechamber. Bring a scribe to score the games; Rei shall be the judge, and hold the stakes. But beware of the golden Cup

of Pasht! Drain it not to-night, lest I win a love game, though we do not play for love!

"The Prince went scowling away, and Meriamun laughed, but I foresaw mischief. The stakes were too high, the match was too strange, but Meriamun would not listen to me, for she was very wilful.

"The sun fell, and two hours after the Royal Prince of Kush came with his scribe, and found Meriamun with the board of squares before her, in her antechamber.

"He sat down without a word, then he asked, who should first take the field.

"‘Wait,’ she said, ‘first let us set the stakes,’ and lifting from her brow the golden snake of royalty, she shook her soft hair loose, and gave the coronet to me. ‘If I lose,’ she said, ‘never may I wear the uraeus crown.’

"‘That shalt thou never while I draw breath,’ answered the Prince, as he too lifted the symbol of his royalty from his head and gave it to me.

There was a difference between the circlets, the coronet of Meriamun was crowned with one crested snake, that of the divine Prince was crowned with twain.

“‘Ay, Meneptah,’ she said, ‘but perchance Osiris, God of the Dead, waits thee, for surely he loves those too great and good for earth. Take thou the field and to the play.’ At her words of evil omen, he frowned. But he took the field and readily, for he knew the game well.

“She moved in answer heedlessly enough, and afterwards she played at random and carelessly, pushing the pieces about with little skill. And so he won this first game quickly, and crying, ‘*Pharaoh is dead*,’ swept the pieces from the board. ‘See how I better thee,’ he went on in mockery. ‘Thine is a woman’s game; all attack and no defence.’

“‘Boast not yet, Meneptah,’ she said. ‘There are still two sets to play. See, the board is set and I take the field.’

"This time the game went differently, for the Prince could scarce make prisoner of a single piece save of one temple and two bowmen only, and presently it was the turn of Meriamun to cry '*Pharaoh is dead,*' and to sweep the pieces from the board. This time Meneptah did not boast but scowled, while I set the board and the scribe wrote down the game upon his tablets. Now it was the Prince's turn to take the field.

"'In the name of the holy Thoth,' he cried, 'to whom I vow great gifts of victory.'

"'In the name of holy Pasht,' she made answer, 'to whom I make daily prayer.' For, being a maid, she swore by the Goddess of Chastity, and being Meriamun, by the Goddess of Vengeance.

"'Tis fitting thou should'st vow by her of the Cat's Head,' he said, sneering.

"'Yes; very fitting,' she answered, 'for perchance she'll lend me her claws. Play thou, Prince Meneptah.'

“And he played, and so well that for a while the game went against her. But at length, when they had struggled long, and Meriamun had lost the most of her pieces, a light came into her face as though she had found what she sought. And while the Prince called for wine and drank, she lay back in her chair and looked upon the board. Then she moved so shrewdly and upon so deep a plan that he fell into the trap that she had laid for him, and could never escape. In vain he vowed gifts to the holy Thoth, and promised such a temple as there was none in Khem.

“‘Thoth hears thee not; he is the God of lettered men,’ said Meriamun, mocking him. Then he cursed and drank more wine.

“‘Fools seek wit in wine, but only wise men find it,’ quoth she again. ‘Behold, Royal brother, *Pharaoh is dead*, and I have won the match, and beaten thee at thine own game. Rei, my servant, give me that circlet; nay, not my own, the double

one, which the divine Prince wagered. So I set it on my brow, for it is mine, Meneptah. In this, as in all things else, I have conquered thee.'

"And she rose, and standing full in the light of the lamps, the Royal uraeus on her brow, she mocked him, bidding him come do homage to her who won his crown, and stretching forth her small hand for him to kiss it. And so wondrous was her beauty that the divine Prince of Kush ceased to call upon the evil Gods because of his ill fortune, and stood gazing on her.

"'By Ptah, but thou art fair,' he cried, 'and I pardon my father at last for willing thee to be my Queen!'

"'But I will never pardon him,' said Meriamun.

"Now the Prince had drunk much wine.

"'Thou shalt be my Queen,' he said, 'and for earnest I will kiss thee. This, at the least, being the strongest, I can do.' And ere she could escape him, he passed his arm about her and

seized her by the girdle, and kissed her on the lips and let her go.

“Meriamun grew white as the dead. By her side there hung a dagger. Swiftly she drew it, and swiftly struck at his heart, so that had he not shrunk from the steel surely he had been slain; and she cried as she struck, ‘Thus, Prince, I pay thy kisses back.’

“But as it chanced, she only pierced his arm, and before she could strike again I had seized her by the hand.

“‘Thou serpent,’ said the Prince, pale with rage and fear. ‘I tell thee I will kiss thee yet, whether thou wilt or not, and thou shalt pay for this.’

“But she laughed softly now that her anger was spent, and I led him forth to seek a physician, who should bind up his wound. And when he was gone, I returned, and spoke to her, wringing my hands.

“‘Oh, Royal Lady, what hast thou done?

Thou knowest well that thy divine father destines thee to wed the Prince of Kush whom but now thou didst smite so fiercely.'

"'Nay, Rei, I will none of him—the dull clod, who is called the son of Pharaoh. Moreover, he is my half-brother, and it is not meet that I should wed my brother. For nature cries aloud against the custom of the land.'

"'Nevertheless, Lady, it is the custom of thy Royal house, and thy father's will. Thus the Gods, thine ancestors, were wed; Isis to Osiris. Thus great Thothmes and Amenemhat did and decreed, and all their forefathers and all their seed. Oh, bethink thee—I speak it for thine ear, for I love thee as mine own daughter—bethink thee, for thou canst not escape, that Pharaoh's bed is the step to Pharaoh's throne. Thou lovest power; here is the gate of power, and mayhap upon a time the master of the gate shall be gone and thou shalt sit in the gate alone.'

"'Ah, Rei, now thou speakest like the coun-

sellor of those who would be kings. Oh, did I not hate him with this hatred! And yet can I rule him. Why, 'twas no chance game that we played this night: the future lay upon the board. See, his diadem is upon my brow! At first he won, for I chose that he should win. Well, so mayhap it shall be; mayhap I shall give myself to him—hating him the while. And then the next game; that shall be for life and love and all things dear, and I shall win it, and mine shall be the uraeus crest, and mine shall be the double crown of ancient Khem, and I shall rule like Hatshepu, the great Queen of old, for I am strong, and to the strong is victory.'

"'Yes,' I made answer, 'but, Lady, see thou that the Gods turn not thy strength to weakness; thou art too passionate to be all strength, and in a woman's heart passion is the door by which King Folly enters. To-day thou hatest, beware, lest to-morrow thou should'st love.'

"'Love,' she said, gazing scornfully; 'Meria-

mun loves not till she find a man worthy of her love.'

"'Ay, and then———?'

"'And then she loves to all destruction, and woe to them who cross her path. Rei, farewell.'

"Then suddenly she spoke to me in another tongue, that few know save her and me, and that none can read save her and me, a dead tongue of a dead people, the people of that ancient City of the Rock, whence all our fathers came.*

* Probably the mysterious and indecipherable ancient books, which were occasionally excavated in old Egypt, were written in this dead language of a more ancient and now forgotten people. Such was the book discovered at Coptos, in the sanctuary there, by a priest of the Goddess. "The whole earth was dark, but the moon shone all about the Book." A scribe of the period of the Ramessids mentions another indecipherable ancient writing. "Thou tellest me thou understandest no word of it, good or bad. There is, as it were, a wall about it that none may climb. Thou art instructed, yet thou knowest it not; this makes me afraid." Birch, *Zeitschrift*, 1871, pp. 61-64. *Papyrus Anastasi*, I, pl. X. 1. 8, pl. X. 1. 4. Maspero, *Hist. Anc.*, pp. 66-67.

“‘I go,’ she said, and I trembled as she spoke, for no man speaks in this language when he has any good thought in his heart. ‘I go to seek the counsel of That thou knowest,’ and she touched the golden snake which she had won.

“Then I threw myself on the earth at her feet, and clasped her knees, crying, ‘My daughter, my daughter, sin not this great sin. Nay, for all the kingdoms of the world, wake not That which sleepeth, nor warm again into life That which is a-cold.’

“But she only nodded, and put me from her,”—and the old man’s face grew pale as he spoke.

“What meant she?” said the Wanderer.

Rei hid his face in his hands, and for a space he was silent.

“Nay, wake not *thou* That which sleepeth, Wanderer,” he said, at length. “My tongue is sealed. I tell thee more than I would tell another. Do not ask,—but hark! They come again!

Now may Ra and Pasht and Amen curse them; may the red swine's mouth of Set gnaw upon them in Amenti; may the Fish of Sebek flesh his teeth of stone in them for ever, and feed and feed again!"

"Why dost thou curse thus, Rei, and who are they that go by?" said the Wanderer. "I hear their tramping and their song."

Indeed there came a light noise of many shuffling feet, pattering outside the Palace wall, and the words of a song rang out triumphantly:

The Lord our God He doth sign and wonder,
Tokens He shows in the land of Khem,
He hath shattered the pride of the Kings asunder
And casteth His shoe o'er the Gods of them!
He hath brought forth frogs in their holy places,
He hath sprinkled the dust upon crown and hem,
He hath hated their kings and hath darkened their faces;
Wonders He works in the land of Khem.

"These are the accursed blaspheming conjurors and slaves, the Apura," said Rei, as the music and the tramping died away. "Their

magic is greater than the lore even of us who are instructed, for their leader was one of ourselves, a shaven priest, and knows our wisdom. Never do they march and sing thus but evil comes of it. Ere day dawn we shall have news of them. May the Gods destroy them, they are gone for the hour. It were well if Meriamun the Queen would let them go for ever, as they desire, to their death in the desert, but she hardens the King's heart."

CHAPTER VII.

THE QUEEN'S VISION.

THERE was silence without at last; the clamour and the tread of the Apura were hushed in the distance, dying far away, and Rei grew calm, when he heard no longer the wild song, and the clashing of the timbrels.

“I must tell thee, Eperitus,” he said, “how the matter ended between the divine Prince and Meriamun. She bowed her pride before her father and her brother: her father’s will was hers; she seemed to let her secret sleep, and she set her own price on her hand. In everything she must be the equal of Pharaoh—that was her price; and in all the temples and all the cities she was to be solemnly proclaimed joint heir with him of the Upper and Lower Land. The

bargain was struck and the price was paid. After that night over the game of pieces Meriamun was changed. Thenceforth she did not mock at the Prince, she made herself gentle and submissive to his will.

“So the time drew on till at length in the beginning of the month of the rising of the waters came the day of her bridal. With a mighty pomp was Pharaoh's daughter wedded to Pharaoh's son. But her hand was cold as she stood at the altar, cold as the hand of one who sleeps in Osiris. Proudly and coldly she sat in the golden chariot passing in and out the great gates of Tanis. Only when she listened and heard the acclaiming thousands shout *Meriamun* so loudly that the cry of *Meneptah* was lost in the echoes of her name—then only did she smile.

“Cold, too, she sat in her white robes at the feast that Pharaoh made, and she never looked at the husband by her side, though he looked kindly on her.

"The feast was long, but it ended at last, and then came the music and the singers, but Meriamun, making excuse, rose and went out, attended by her ladies. And I also, weary and sad at heart, passed thence to my own chamber and busied myself with the instruments of my art, for, stranger, I build the houses of gods and kings.

"Presently, as I sat, there came a knocking at the door, and a woman entered wrapped in a heavy cloak. She put aside the cloak, and before me was Meriamun in all her bridal robes.

"'Heed me not, Rei,' she said, 'I am yet free for an hour; and I would watch thee at thy labour. Nay, it is my humour; gainsay me not, for I love well to look on that wrinkled face of thine, scored by the cunning chisel of thy knowledge and thy years. So from a child have I watched thee tracing the shapes of mighty temples that shall endure when ourselves, and perchance

the very Gods we worship, have long since ceased to be. Ah, Rei, thou wise man, thine is the better part, for thou buildest in cold enduring stone and attirest thy walls as thy fancy bids thee. But I—I build in the dust of human hearts, and my will is written in their dust. When I am dead, raise me a tomb more beautiful than ever has been known, and write upon the portal, *Here, in the last temple of her pride, dwells that tired builder, Meriamun, the Queen.*'

"Thus she talked wildly in words with little reason.

"'Nay, speak not so,' I said, 'for is it not thy bridal night? What dost thou here at such a time?'

"'What do I here? Surely I come to be a child again! See, Rei, in all wide Khem there is no woman so shamed, so lost, so utterly undone as is to-night the Royal Meriamun, whom thou lovest. I am lower than she who plies the

street for bread, for the loftier the spirit the greater is the fall. I am sold into shame, and power is my price. Oh, cursed be the fate of woman who only by her beauty can be great. Oh, cursed be that ancient Counsellor thou wottest of, and cursed be I who wakened That which slept, and warmed That which was a-cold in my breath and in my breast! And cursed be this sin to which he led me! Spurn me, Rei; strike me on the cheek, spit upon me, on Meriamun, the Royal harlot who sells herself to win a crown. Oh, I hate him, hate him, and I will pay him in shame for shame—him, the clown in king's attire. See here,'—and from her robe she drew a white flower that was known to her and me—'twice to-day have I been minded with this deadly blossom to make an end of me, and of all my shame, and all my empty greed of glory. But this thought has held my hand: I, Meriamun, will live to look across his grave and break his images, and beat out the writings of his name from every

temple wall in Khem, as they beat out the hated name of Hatshepu. I——' and suddenly she burst into a rain of tears; she who was not wont to weep.

"'Nay, touch me not,' she said. 'They were but tears of anger. Meriamun is mistress of her Fate, not Fate of Meriamun. And now, my lord awaits me, and I must be gone. Kiss me on the brow, old friend, whilst yet I am the Meriamun thou knewest, and then kiss me no more for ever. At the least this is well for thee, for when Meriamun is Queen of Khem thou shalt be first in all the land, and stand on the footsteps of my throne. Farewell.' And she gathered up her raiment and cast her white flower of death in the flame of the brazier, and was gone, leaving me yet sadder at heart. For now I knew that she was not as other women are, but greater for good or evil.

"On the morrow night I sat again at my task,

and again there came a knocking at the door, and again a woman entered and threw aside her wrappings. It was Meriamun. She was pale and stern, and as I rose she waved me back.

“‘Has, then, the Prince—thy husband——,’ I stammered.

“‘Speak not to me of the Prince, Rei, my servant,’ she made answer. ‘Yesternight I spoke to thee wildly, my mind was overwrought; let it be forgotten—a wife am I, a happy wife;’ and she smiled so strangely that I shrunk back from her.

“‘Now to my errand. I have dreamed a dream, a troublous dream, and thou art wise and instructed, therefore I pray thee interpret my vision. I slept and dreamed of a man, and in my dream I loved him more than I can tell. For my heart beat to his heart, and in the light of him I lived, and all my soul was his, and I knew that I loved him for ever. And Pharaoh

was my husband; but, in my dream, I loved him not. Now there came a woman rising out of the sea, more beautiful than I, with a beauty fairer and more changeful than the dawn upon the mountains; and she, too, loved this godlike man, and he loved her. Then we strove together for his love, matching beauty against beauty, and wit against wit, and magic against magic. Now one conquered, and now the other; but in the end the victory was mine, and I went arrayed as for a marriage bed—and I clasped a corpse.

“‘I woke and again I slept, and saw myself wearing another garb, and speaking another tongue. Before me was the man I loved, and there, too, was the woman, wrapped about with beauty, and I was changed, and yet I was the very Meriamun thou seest. And once more we struggled for the mastery and for this man’s love, and in that day she conquered me.

“‘I slept, and again I woke, and in another land than Khem—a strange land, and yet me-

thought I knew it from long ago. There I dwelt among the graves, and dark faces were about me, and I wore That thou knowest for a girdle. And the tombs of the rock wherein we dwelt were scored with the writings of a dead tongue—the tongue of that land whence our fathers came. We were all changed, yet the same, and once more the woman and I struggled for the mastery, and though I seemed to conquer, yet a sea of fire came over me, and I woke and I slept again.

“Then confusion was piled upon confusion, nor can my memory hold all that came to pass. For this game played itself afresh in lands, and lives, and tongues without number. Only the last bout and the winner were not revealed to me.

“And in my dream I cried aloud to the protecting Gods to escape out of the dream, and I sought for light that I might see whence these things were. Then, as in a vision, the Past

opened up its gates. It seemed that upon a time, thousand, thousand ages ago, I and this man of my dream had arisen from nothingness and looked in each other's eyes, and loved with a love unspeakable, and vowed a vow that shall endure from time to time and world to world. For we were not mortal then, but partook of the nature of the Gods, being more fair and great than any of human kind, and our happiness was the happiness of Heaven. But in our great joy we hearkened to the Voice of That thou knowest, of that Thing, Rei, with which, against thy counsel, I have but lately dealt. The kiss of our love awakened That which slept, the fire of our love warmed That which was a-cold! We defied the holy Gods, worshipping them not, but rather each the other, for we knew that as the Gods we were eternal. And the Gods were angered against us and drew us up into their presence. And while we trembled they spake as with a voice:

“““Ye twain who are one life, each completing each, because with your kisses ye have wakened That which slept, and with the fire of your love have warmed That which was a-cold: because ye have forgotten them that gave you life and love and joy: hearken to your Doom!

“““From Two be ye made *Three*, and through all Time strive ye to be twain again. Pass from this Holy Place down to the Hell of Earth, and though ye be immortal put on the garments of mortality. Pass on from Life to Life, live and love and hate and seem to die: have acquaintance with every lot, and in your blind forgetfulness, being one and being equal, work each other's woe according to the law of Earth, and for your love's sake sin and be shamed, perish and re-arise, appear to conquer and be conquered, pursuing your threefold destiny, which is one destiny, till the hours of punishment are outworn, and, at the word of Fate, the unaltering circle meets, and the veil of blindness falls from your

eyes, and, as a scroll, your folly is unrolled, and the hid purpose of your sorrow is accomplished and once more ye are Twain and One."

"Then, as we trembled, clinging each to each, again the great Voice spoke:

"“Ye twain who are One—let That to which ye have hearkened divide you and enfold you! Be ye Three!"

"And as the Voice spoke I was torn with agony, and strength went out of me, and there, by him I loved, stood the woman of my dream crowned with every glory and adorned with the Star. And we were three. And between him and me, yet enfolding him and me, writhed that Thing thou wottest of. And he whom I loved turned to look upon the fair woman, wondering, and she smiled and stretched out her arms towards him as one who would take that which is her own, and, Rei, in that hour, though it was but in a dream, I knew the mortal pain of jealousy, and awoke trembling. And now read thou

this vision, Rei, thou who art learned in the interpretation of dreams and in the ways of sleep.'

"'Oh, Lady,' I made answer, 'this thing is too high for me, I cannot interpret it; but where thou art, there may I be to help thee.'

"'I know thy love,' she said, 'but in thy words is little light. So—so—let it pass! It was but a dream, and if indeed it came from the Under World, why, it was from no helpful God, but rather from Set, the Tormentor; or from Pasht, the Terrible, who throws the creeping shadow of her doom upon the mirror of my sleep. For that which is decreed will surely come to pass! I am blown like the dust by the breath of Fate; now to rest upon the Temple's loftiest tops, now to be trodden underfoot of slaves, and now to be swallowed by the bitter deep, and in season thence rolled forth again. I love not this lord of mine, who shall be Pharaoh, and never may *he* come whom I shall love. 'Tis

well that I love him not, for to love is to be a slave. When the heart is cold then the hand is strong, and I am fain to be the Queen leading Pharaoh by the beard, the first of all the ancient land of Khem; for I was not born to serve. Nay, while I may, I rule, awaiting the end of rule. Look forth, Rei, and see how the rays from Mother Isis' throne flood all the courts and all the city's streets and break in light upon the water's breast. So shall the Moon-child's fame flood all this land of Khem. What matters it, if ere the morn Isis must pass to her dominion of the Dead, and the voice of Meriamun be hushed within a sepulchre?'

"So she spoke and went thence, and on her face was no bride's smile, but rather such a gaze as that with which the great sphinx, Horemku, looks out across the desert sands."

"A strange Queen, Rei," said the Wanderer, as he paused, "but what have I to make in this tale of a bride and her mad dreams?"

“More than thou shalt desire,” said Rei; “but let us come to the end, and thou shalt hear thy part in the Fate.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE KA, THE BAI, AND THE KHOU.

“THE Divine Pharaoh Rameses died and was gathered to Osiris. With these hands I closed his coffin and set him in his splendid tomb, where he shall rest unharmed for ever till the day of the awakening. And Meriamun and Menepthah reigned in Khem. But to Pharaoh she was very cold, though he did her will in everything, and they had but one child, so that in a while he wearied of her loveliness.

“But hers was the master-mind, and she ruled Pharaoh as she ruled all else.

“For me, my lot was bettered; she talked much with me, and advanced me to great dignity, so that I was the first Master Builder in Khem, and Commander of the legion of Amen.

“Now it chanced that Meriamun made a feast, where she entertained Pharaoh, and Hataska sat beside him. She was the first lady about the Queen’s person, a beautiful but insolent woman, who had gained Pharaoh’s favour for the hour. Now wine worked so with the King that he toyed openly with the lady Hataska’s hand, but Meriamun the Queen took no note, though Hataska, who had also drunk of the warm wine of the Lower Land, grew insolent, as was her wont. She quaffed deep from her cup of gold, and bade a slave bear it to the Queen, crying, ‘Pledge me, my sister.’

“The meaning of her message was plain to all who heard; this waiting lady openly declared herself wife to Pharaoh and an equal of the Queen. Now Meriamun cared nothing for Pharaoh’s love, but for power she did care, and she frowned, while a light shone in her dark eyes; yet she took the cup and touched it with her lips.

“Presently she lifted her own cup in turn and

toyed with it, then made pretence to drink, and said softly to the King's paramour, who had pledged her:

“‘Pledge me in answer, Hataska, my servant, for soon, methinks, thou shalt be greater than the Queen.’

“Now this foolish woman read her saying wrong, and took the golden cup from the eunuch who bore it.

“With a little nod to the Queen, and a wave of her slim hand, Hataska drank, and instantly, with a great cry, she fell dead across the board. Then, while all the company sat in terror, neither daring to be silent nor to speak, and while Meriamun smiled scornfully on the dark head lying low among the roses on the board, Pharaoh leaped up, mad with wrath, and called to the guards to seize the Queen. But she waved them back, and, speaking in a slow, cold voice, she said:

“‘Dare not to touch Khemi's anointed Queen

lest your fate be as *her* fate. For thee, Meneptah, forget not thy marriage oath. What, am I Queen, and shall thy wantons throw their insolence in my teeth and name me their sister? Not so, for if my eyes be blind yet are my ears open. Peace, she is rightly served—choose thou a lowlier mistress!’

“And Pharaoh made no answer, for he feared her with an ever-growing fear. But she, sinking back in her seat of state, played with the gold kepher on her breast, and watched them bear the body forth to the House of Osiris. One by one all the company made obeisance and passed thence, glad to be gone, till at the last there were left only Pharaoh and Meriamun the Queen, and myself—Rei the Priest—for all were much afraid. Then Pharaoh spoke, looking neither at her nor at me, and half in fear, half in anger.

“‘Thou hateful woman, accursed be the day when first I looked upon thy beauty. Thou hast conquered me, but beware, for I am still Pharaoh

and thy Lord. Cross my purpose once again, and, by Him who sleeps at Philæ, I will discrown thee and give thy body to the tormentors, and set thy soul loose to follow her whom thou hast slain.'

"Then Meriamun answered proudly:

"Pharaoh, be warned: lift but one finger against my majesty and thou art doomed. Thou canst not slay me, but I can over-match thee, and I swear by the same oath! By Him who sleeps at Philæ, lift but a hand against me, ay, harbour one thought of treachery, and thou diest. Not lightly can I be deceived, for I have messengers that thou canst not hear. Something, Royal Menephtah, do I know of the magic of that Queen Taia who was before me. Now listen—do this one thing and all shall be well. Go on thy path and leave me to follow mine. Queen I am, Queen I will remain, and in all matters of the State mine must be an equal voice though it is thine that speaks. And, for the rest, we are

apart henceforth, for thou fearest me, and, Meneptah, I love not thee, nor any man.'

"'As thou hast spoken, so be it,' quoth Pharaoh, for his heart sank, and his fear came back upon him. 'Evil was the day when first we met, and this is the price of my desire. Henceforth we are apart in bed and board, but in the council we are still one, for our ends are one. I know thy power, Meriamun, thou gifted of the evil Gods; thou needest not fear that I shall seek to slay thee, for a spear cast against the heavens returns on him who threw it. Rei, my servant, thou wert witness to our oaths; hear now their undoing. Meriamun, the Queen of ancient Khem, thou art no more wife of mine. Farewell.'

"And he went heavily and stricken with fear.

"'Nay,' she said, gazing after him, 'no more am I Meneptah's wife, but still am I Khemi's dreaded Queen. Oh, thou old priest, I am weary. See what a lot is mine, who have all things but love, and yet am sick of all! I longed for power, and

power is mine, and what is power? It is a rod wherewith we beat the air that straightway closes on the stroke. Yes, I tire of my loveless days and of this dull round of common things. Oh, for one hour of love and in that hour to die! Oh that the future would lift its veil and disclose the face of time to be! Say, Rei! Wilt thou be bold and dare a deed?' And she clasped me by the sleeve and whispered in my ear, in the dead tongue known to her and me—'Her I slew—thou sawest——'

"'Ay, Queen, I saw—what of her? 'Twas ill done.'

"'Nay, 'twas rightly done and well done. But thou knowest she is not yet cold, nor for a while will be, and I have the art to drag her spirit back ere she be cold, from where she is, and to force knowledge from its lips—for being an Osiris all the future is open to her in this hour.'

"'Nay, nay,' I cried. 'It is unholy—not

lightly may we disturb the dead, lest the Guardian Gods be moved to anger.'

"'Yet will I do it, Rei. If thou dost fear, come not. But I go. I am fain for knowledge, and thus only may I win it. If I die in the dread endeavour, write this of Meriamun the Queen: That in seeking the to-be—she found it!'

"'Nay, Royal Lady,' I answered, 'thou shalt not go alone. I too have some skill in magic, and perchance can ward evil from thee. So, if indeed thou wilt dare this dreadful thing, behold now, as ever, I am thy servant.'

"'It is well. See, now, the body will this night be laid in the sanctuary of the Temple of Osiris that is near the great gates, as is the custom, to await the coming of the embalmers. Come ere she be colder than my heart, come with me, Rei, to the house of the Lord of the Dead!'

"She passed to her chamber, wrapped herself about in a dark robe, and hurried with me to

the Temple doors, where we were challenged by the guards.

“‘Who passes? In the name of the Holy Osiris speak.’

“‘Rei, the Master Builder and the anointed Priest, and with him another,’ I made answer. ‘Open.’

“‘Nay, I open not. There is one within who may not be wakened.’

“‘Who, then, is within?’

“‘She whom the Queen slew.’

“‘The Queen sends one who would look on her she slew.’

“Then the priest gazed on the hooded form beside me and started back, crying, ‘A token, noble Rei.’

“I held up the Royal signet, and, bowing, he opened. Being come within the Temple I lit the tapers that had been prepared. Then by their feeble light we passed through the outer

hall till we came to the curtains that veil the sanctuary of the Holy Place, and here I quenched the tapers; for no fire must enter there, save that which burns upon the altar of the dead. But through the curtains came rays of light.

“‘Open!’ said Meriamun, and I opened, and hand in hand we passed in. On the altar that is in the place the flame burnt brightly. The chamber is not wide and great, for this is the smallest of the temples of Tanis, but yet so large that the light could not reach its walls nor pierce the overhanging gloom, and by much gazing scarcely could we discover the outline of the graven shapes of the Holy Gods that are upon the walls. But the light fell clear upon the great statue of the Osiris that was seated behind the altar fashioned in the black stone of Syene, wound about with the corpse-cloths, wearing on his head the crown of the Upper Land, and holding in his hands the crook of divinity and the awful scourge of punishment. The light

shone all about the white and dreadful shape that was placed upon his holy knees, the naked shape of lost Hataska who this night had died at the hand of Meriamun. There she bowed her head against the sacred breast, her long hair streaming down on either side, her arms tied across her heart, and her eyes, whence the hues of life had scarcely faded, widely staring at the darkness of the shrine. For at Tanis to this day it is the custom for a night to place those of high birth or office who die suddenly upon the knees of the statue of Osiris.

“‘See,’ I said to the Queen, speaking low, for the weight of the haunted place sank into my heart, ‘see how she who scarce an hour ago was but a lovely wanton hath by thine act been clad in majesty greater than all the glory of the earth. Bethink thee, wilt thou dare indeed to summon back the spirit to the body whence thou hast set it free? Not easily, O Queen, may it be done for all thy magic, and if perchance she

answereth thee, it may well be that the terror of her words shall utterly o'erwhelm us.'

"'Nay,' she made answer. 'I am instructed. I fear not. I know by what name to call the Khou that hovers on the threshold of the Double Hall of Truth, and how to send it back to its own place. I fear not, but if perchance thou fearest, Rei, depart hence and leave me to the task alone.'

"'Nay,' I said. 'I also am instructed, and I go not. But I say to thee this is unholy.'

"Then Meriamun spake no more—but lifting up her hands she held them heavenwards, and so for a while she stood, her face fixed, as was the face of dead Hataska. Then, as must be done, I drew the circle round us and round the altar and the statue of Osiris and that which sat upon his knee. With my staff I drew it, and standing therein I said the holy words which should ward away the evil things that come near in such an hour.

“Now Meriamun threw a certain powder into the flame upon the altar. Thrice she threw the powder, and as she threw it a ball of flame rose from the altar and floated away, each time that she threw did the ball of fire rise; and this it was needful to do, for by fire only may the dead be manifest, and therefore was a globe of fire given to each of the three shapes that together make the threefold spirit of the dead. And when the three globes of fire had melted into air, passing over the head of the statue of Osiris, thrice did Meriamun cry aloud:

“‘*Hataska! Hataska! Hataska!*

“‘By the dreadful Name I summon thee.

“‘I summon thee from the threshold of the Double Hall.

“‘I summon thee from the Gates of Judgment.

“‘I summon thee from the door of Doom.

“‘By the link of life and death that is between thee and me, I bid thee come from where

thou art and make answer to that which I shall ask of thee.'

"She ceased, but no answer came. Still the cold Osiris smiled, and still the body on his knee sat with open eyes gazing into nothingness.

"'Not thus easily,' I whispered, 'may this dreadful thing be done. Thou art instructed in the Word of Fear. If thou darest, let it pass thy lips, or let us be gone.'

"'Nay, it shall be spoken,' she said—and thus she wrought. Passing to the statue she hid her head within her cloak and with both hands grasped the feet of the slain Hataska.

"Seeing this I also crouched upon the floor and hid my face, for it is death to hear that Word with an uncovered face.

"Then in so soft a whisper that scarce had its breath stirred a feather on her lips, Meriamun spoke the Word of Fear which may not be written, whose sound has power to pass all space and open the ears of the dead who dwell in

Amenti. Softly she said it, but in a shout of thunder it was caught up and echoed from her lips, and down the eternal halls it seemed to rush on the feet of storm and the wings of wind, so that the roof rocked and the deep foundations of the Temple quivered like a wind-stirred tree.

“‘Unveil, ye mortals!’ cried a dreadful voice, ‘and look upon the sight of fear that ye have dared to summon.’

“And I rose and cast my cloak from about my face and gazed, then sank down in terror. For round about the circle that I had drawn pressed all the multitude of the dead; countless as the desert sands they pressed, gazing with awful eyes upon us twain. And the fire that was on the altar died away, but yet was there light, for it shone from those dead eyes, and in the eyes of lost Hataska there was light.

“And ever the faces changed, never for one beat of time did they cease to change. For as

we gazed upon a face it would melt, even to the eyes, and round these same eyes again would gather but no more the same. And like the sloping sides of pyramids were the faces set about us from the ground to the Temple roof—and on us were fixed their glowing eyes.

“And I, Rei, being instructed, knew that to suffer myself to be overcome with terror was death, as it was death to pass without the circle. So in my heart I called upon Osiris, Lord of the Dead, to protect us, and even as I named the ineffable name, lo! all the thousand thousand faces bent themselves in adoration and then, turning, looked each upon the other even as though each spake to each, and changed, and swiftly changed.

“‘Meriamun,’ I said, gathering up my strength, ‘fear not, but beware!’

“‘Nay, wherefore should I fear,’ she answered, ‘because the veil of sense is torn, and for an hour we see those who are ever about

our path and whose eyes watch our most secret thought continually? I fear not.' And she stepped boldly, even to the edge of the circle, and cried:

"'All hail, ye Sahus, spirits of the awful dead, among whom I also shall be numbered.'

"And as she came the changing faces shrunk away, leaving a space before her. And in the space there grew two arms, mighty and black, that stretched themselves towards her, until there was not the length of three grains of wheat betwixt the clutching fingers and her breast.

"But Meriamun only laughed and drew back a space.

"'Not so, thou Enemy,' she said, 'this circle thou may'st not break; it is too strong for thee. But to the work. Hataska, once again by the link of life and death I summon thee—and this time thou must come, thou who wast a wanton and now art "greater than the Queen."'

"And as she spoke, from the dead form of

the woman on Osiris' knee there issued forth another form and stood before us, as a snake issues from its slough. And as was the dead Hataska so was this form, feature for feature, look for look, and limb for limb. But still the corpse rested upon Osiris' knee, for this was but the *Ka* that stood before us.

“And thus spoke the voice of Hataska in the lips of the *Ka*:

“‘What wouldest thou with me who am no more of thy company, O thou by whose hand my body did perish? Why troublest thou me?’

“And Meriamun made answer: ‘I would this of thee, that thou shouldest declare unto me the future, even in the presence of this great company. Speak, I command thee.’

“And the *Ka* said: ‘Nay, Meriamun, that I cannot do, for I am but the *Ka*—the Dweller in the Tomb, the guardian of what was Hataska whom thou didst slay, whom I must watch through all the days of death till resurrection is.

Of the future I know naught; seek thou that which knows.'

"'Stand thou on one side,' quoth the Queen, and the Dweller in the Tomb obeyed.

"Then once more she called upon Hataska and there came a sound of rushing wings. And behold, on the head of the statue of Osiris sat a great bird, feathered as it were with gold. But the bird had the head of a woman, and the face was fashioned as the face of Hataska. And thus it spoke, that was the *Bai*:

"'What wouldest thou with me, Meriamun, who am no more of thy company? Why dost thou draw me from the Under World, thou by whose hand my body did perish?'

"And Meriamun said: 'This I would of thee, that thou shouldest declare unto me the future. Speak, I command thee.'

"And the Bai said: 'Nay, Meriamun, that I cannot do. I am but the Bai of her who was Hataska, and I fly from Death to Life and Life

to Death, till the hour of awakening is. Of the future I know naught; seek thou that which knows.'

" 'Rest thou where thou art,' quoth the Queen, and there it rested, awful to see.

"Then once more Meriamun called upon Hataska, bidding her hear the summons where she was.

"And behold the eyes of the Dead One that was upon the knee of Osiris glowed, and glowed the eyes of the Dweller in the Tomb, and of the winged Messenger who sat above. And then there was a sound as the sound of wind, and from above, cleaving the darkness, descended a Tongue of Flame and rested on the brow of the dead Hataska. And the eyes of all the thousand thousand spirits turned and gazed upon the Tongue of Flame. And then dead Hataska spoke—though her lips moved not, yet she spoke. And this she said:

" 'What wouldest thou with me, Meriamun,

who am no more of thy company? Why dost thou dare to trouble me, thou by whose hand my body did perish, drawing me from the threshold of the Double Hall of Truth, back to the Over World?’

“And Meriamun the Queen said, ‘Oh, thou *Khou*, for this purpose have I called thee. I am aweary of my days and I fain would learn the future. The future fain would I learn, but the forked tongue of That which sleeps tells me no word, and the lips of That which is a-cold are dumb! Tell me, then, thou, I charge thee by the word that has power to open the lips of the dead, thou who in all things art instructed, what shall be the burden of my days?’

“And the dread *Khou* made answer: ‘Love shall be the burden of thy days, and Death shall be the burden of thy love. Behold one draws near from out the North whom thou hast loved, whom thou shalt love from life to life, till all things are accomplished. Bethink thee of a

dream that thou dreamedst as thou didst lie on Pharaoh's bed, and read its riddle. Meriamun, thou art great and thy name is known upon the earth, and in Amenti is thy name known. High is thy fate, and through blood and sorrow shalt thou find it. I have spoken, let me hence.'

"'It is well,' the Queen made answer. 'But not yet mayest thou go hence. First I command thee, by the word of dread and by the link of life and death, declare unto me if here upon the earth and in this life I shall possess him whom I shall love?'

"'In sin and craft and sorrow, Meriamun, thou shalt possess him; in shame and jealous agony he shall be taken from thee by one who is stronger than thou, though thou art strong; by one more beautiful than thou, though thou art beautiful; and ruin thou shalt give him for his guerdon, and ruin of the heart shalt thou harvest for thy portion. But for this time she shall escape thee, whose footsteps march with thine,

and with his who shall be thine and hers. Nevertheless, in a day to come thou shalt pay her back measure for measure, and evil for evil. I have spoken. Let me hence.'

"'Not yet, O Khou—not yet. I have still to learn. Show me the face of her who is mine enemy, and the face of him who is my love.'

"'Thrice mayest thou speak to me, O thou greatly daring,' answered the dread Khou, 'and thrice I may make reply, and then farewell till I meet thee on the threshold of the hall whence thou hast drawn me. Look now on the face of that Hataska whom thou slewest.'

"And we looked, and behold the face of dead Hataska changed, and changed the face of the Double, the *Ka* that stood on one side, and the face of the great bird, the *Bai*, that spread his wings about the head of Osiris. And they grew beautiful, yes, most exceeding beautiful so that it cannot be told, and the beauty was that of a woman asleep. Then lo, there hung above

Hataska, as it were, the shadow of one who watched her sleeping. And his face we saw not, for, O thou Wanderer, it was hidden by the visor of a golden two-horned helm, and in that helm stood fast *the bronze point of a broken spear!* But he was clad in the armour of the people of the Northern Sea, the Aquaiusha, and his hair fell dark about his shoulders like the petals of the hyacinth flower.

“‘Behold thine enemy and behold thy love! Farewell,’ said the dread Khou, speaking through dead Hataska’s lips, and as the words died the sight of beauty faded and the Tongue of Flame shot upwards and was lost, and once more the eyes of the thousand thousand dead turned and looked upon each other, even as though their lips whispered each to each.

“But for a while Meriamun stood silent, as one amazed. Then, awaking, she waved her hand and cried, ‘Begone, thou *Bai!* Begone, thou *Ka!*’

“And the great bird whereof the face was as the face of Hataska spread his golden wings and passed away to his own place, and the Ka that was in the semblance of Hataska drew near to the dead one’s knees, and passed back into her from whom she came. And all the thousand thousand faces melted though the fiery eyes still gazed upon us.

“Then Meriamun covered her head and once more spoke the awful Word, and I also covered up my head. But, as must be done, this second time she called the Word aloud, and yet though she called it loud, it came but as a tiny whisper from her lips. Nevertheless, at the sound of it, once more was the Temple shaken as by a storm.

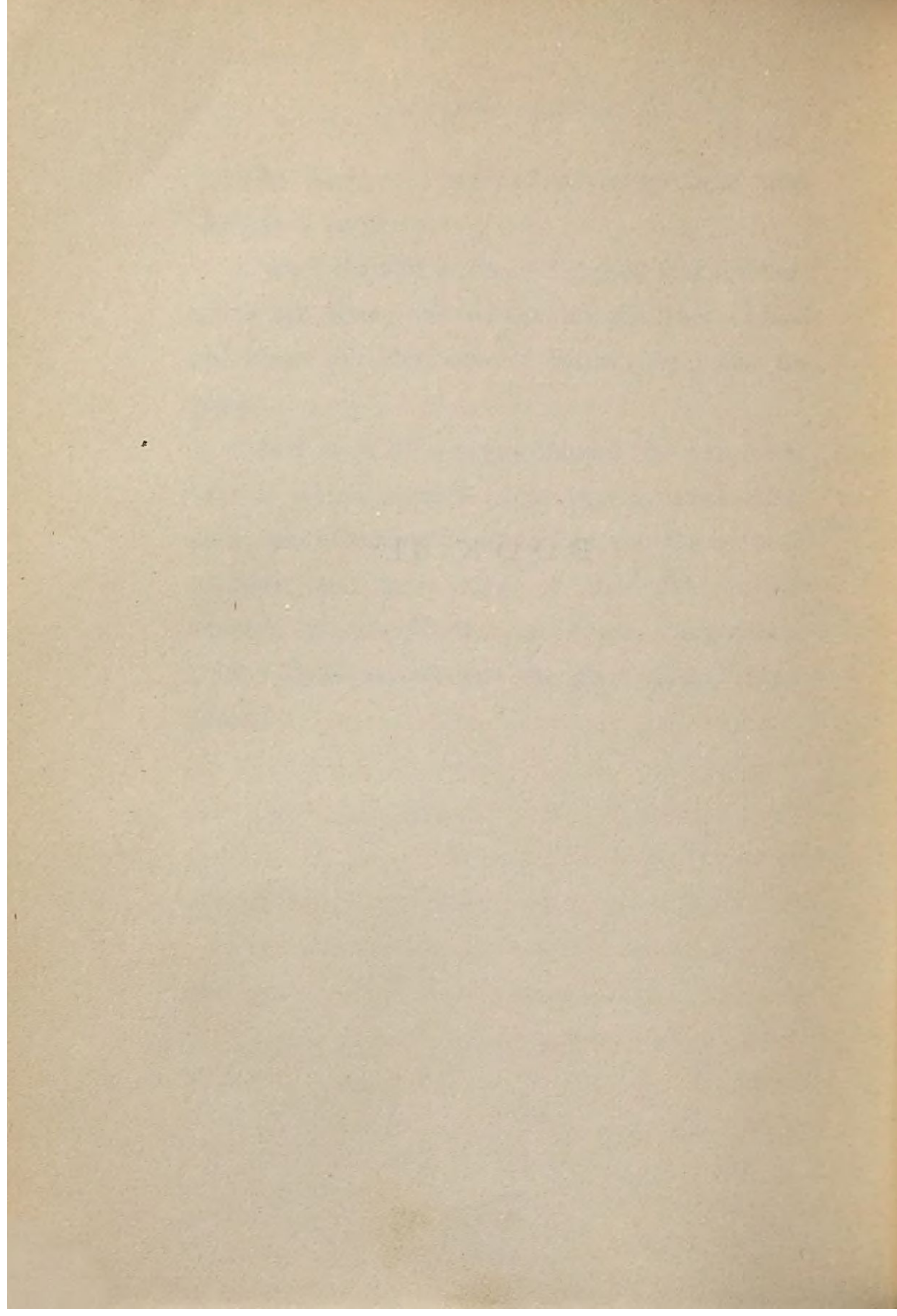
“Then Meriamun unveiled, and behold, again the fire burned upon the altar, and on the knees of the Osiris sat Hataska, cold and still in death, and round them was emptiness and silence.

“But Meriamun grasped me by the arm, and she spoke faintly:

“‘Now that all is done, I greatly fear for that which has been, and that which shall be. Lead me hence, O Rei, son of Pames, for I can no more.’

“And so with a heavy heart I led her forth, who of all sorceresses is the very greatest. Behold, thou Wanderer, wherefore the Queen was troubled at the coming of the man in the armour of the North, in whose two-horned golden helm stands fast the point of a broken spear.”

BOOK II.



CHAPTER I.

THE PROPHETS OF THE APURA.

"THESE things are not without the Gods," said the Wanderer, who was called Eperitus, when he had heard all the tale of Rei the Priest, son of Pames, the Head Architect, the Commander of the Legion of Amen. Then he sat silent for a while, and at last raised his eyes and looked upon the old man.

"Thou hast told a strange tale, Rei. Over many a sea have I wandered, and in many a land I have sojourned. I have seen the ways of many peoples, and have heard the voices of the immortal Gods. Dreams have come to me and marvels have compassed me about. It has been laid upon me to go down into Hades, that land

which thou namest Amenti, and to look on the tribes of the Dead; but never till now have I known so strange a thing. For mark thou, when first I beheld this fair Queen of thine I thought she looked upon me strangely, as one who knew my face. And now, Rei, if thou speakest truth, *she* deems that she has met me in the ways of night and magic. Say, then, who was the man of the vision of the Queen, the man with dark and curling locks, clad in golden armour after the fashion of the Achæans whom ye name the Aquaiusha, wearing on his head a golden helm, wherein was fixed a broken spear?"

"Before me sits such a man," said Rei, "or perchance it is a God that my eyes behold."

"No God am I," quoth the Wanderer, smiling, "though the Sidonians deemed me nothing less when the black bow twanged and the swift shafts flew. Read me the riddle, thou that art instructed."

Now the aged Priest looked upon the ground,

then turned his eyes upward, and with muttering lips prayed to Thoth, the God of Wisdom. And when he had made an end of prayer he spoke.

“*Thou* art the man,” he said. “Out of the sea thou hast come to bring the doom of love on the Lady Meriamun and on thyself the doom of death. This I know, but of the rest I know nothing. Now, I pray thee, oh thou who comest in the armour of the North, thou whose face is clothed in beauty, and who art of all men the mightiest and hast of all men the sweetest and most guileful tongue, go back, go back into the sea whence thou camest, and the lands whence thou hast wandered.”

“Not thus easily may men escape their doom,” quoth the Wanderer. “My death may come, as come it must; but know this, Rei, I do not seek the love of Meriamun.”

“Then it well may chance that thou shalt find it, for ever those who seek love lose, and those who seek not find.”

"I am come to seek another love," said the Wanderer, "and I seek her till I die."

"Then I pray the Gods that thou mayest find her, and that Khem may thus be saved from sorrow. But here in Egypt there is no woman so fair as Meriamun, and thou must seek farther as quickly as may be. And now, Eperitus, behold I must away to do service in the Temple of the Holy Amen, for I am his High Priest. But I am commanded by Pharaoh first to bring thee to the feast at the Palace."

Then he led the Wanderer from his chamber and brought him by a side entrance to the great Palace of the Pharaoh at Tanis, near the Temple of Ptah. And first he took him to a chamber that had been made ready for him in the Palace, a beautiful chamber, richly painted with beast-headed Gods and furnished with ivory chairs, and couches of ebony and silver, and with a gilded bed.

Then the Wanderer went into the shining

baths, and dark-eyed girls bathed him and anointed him with fragrant oil, and crowned him with lotus flowers. When they had bathed him they bade him lay aside his golden armour and his bow and the quiver full of arrows, but this the Wanderer would not do, for as he laid the black bow down it thrilled with a thin sound of war. So Rei led him, armed as he was, to a certain antechamber, and there he left him, saying that he would return again when the feast was done. Trumpets blared as the Wanderer waited, drums rolled, and through the wide thrown curtains swept the lovely Meriamun and the divine Pharaoh Meneptah, with many lords and ladies of the Court, all crowned with roses and with lotus blooms.

The Queen was decked in Royal attire, her shining limbs were veiled in brodered silk; about her shoulders was a purple robe, and round her neck and arms were rings of well-wrought gold. She was stately and splendid to see, with pale

brows and beautiful disdainful eyes where dreams seemed to sleep beneath the shadow of her eyelashes. On she swept in all her state and pride of beauty, and behind her came the Pharaoh. He was a tall man, but ill-made and heavy-browed, and to the Wanderer it seemed that he was heavy-hearted too, and that care and terror of evil to come were always in his mind.

Meriamun looked up swiftly.

"Greeting, Stranger," she said. "Thou comest in warlike guise to grace our feast."

"Methought, Royal Lady," he made answer, "that anon when I would have laid it by, this bow of mine sang to me of present war. Therefore I am come armed—even to thy feast."

"Has thy bow such foresight, Eperitus?" said the Queen. "I have heard but once of such a weapon, and that in a minstrel's tale. He came to our Court with his lyre from the Northern Sea, and he sang of the Bow of Odysseus."

"Minstrel or not, thou dost well to come

armed, Wanderer," said the Pharaoh; "for if thy bow sings, my own heart mutters much to me of war to be."

"Follow me, Wanderer, however it fall out," said the Queen.

So he followed her and the Pharaoh till they came to a splendid hall, carven round with images of fighting and feasting. Here, on the painted walls, Rameses Miamun drove the thousands of the Khita before his single valour; here men hunted wild-fowl through the marshes with a great cat for their hound. Never had the Wanderer beheld such a hall since he supped with the Sea King of the fairy isle. On the daïs, raised above the rest, sat the Pharaoh, and by him sat Meriamun the Queen, and by the Queen sat the Wanderer in the golden armour of Paris, and he leaned the black bow against his ivory chair.

Now the feast went on and men ate and drank. The Queen spoke little, but she watched the

Wanderer beneath the lids of her deep-fringed eyes.

Suddenly, as they feasted and grew merry, the doors at the end of the chamber were thrown wide, the Guards fell back in fear, and behold, at the end of the hall, stood two men. Their faces were tawny, dry, wasted with desert wandering; their noses were hooked like eagles' beaks, and their eyes were yellow as the eyes of lions. They were clad in rough skins of beasts, girdled about their waists with leathern thongs, and fiercely they lifted their naked arms, and waved their wands of cedar. Both men were old, one was white-bearded, the other was shaven smooth like the priests of Egypt. As they lifted the rods on high the Guards shrank like beaten hounds, and all the guests hid their faces, save Meriamun and the Wanderer alone. Even Pharaoh dared not look on them, but he murmured angrily in his beard:

"By the name of Osiris," he said, "here be

those Soothsayers of the Apura once again. Now Death waits on those who let them pass the doors."

Then one of the two men, he who was shaven like a priest, cried with a great voice:

"Pharaoh! Pharaoh! Pharaoh! Hearken to the word of Jahveh. Wilt thou let the people go?"

"I will not let them go," he answered.

"Pharaoh! Pharaoh! Pharaoh! Hearken to the word of Jahveh. If thou wilt not let the people go, then shall all the first-born of Khem, of the Prince and the slave, of the ox and the ass, be smitten of Jahveh. Wilt thou let the people go?"

Now Pharaoh hearkened, and those who were at the feast rose and cried with a loud voice:

"O Pharaoh, let the people go! Great woes are fallen upon Khem because of the Apura. O Pharaoh, let the people go!"

Now Pharaoh's heart was softened and he

was minded to let them go, but Meriamun turned to him and said:

“Thou shalt not let the people go. It is not these slaves, nor the God of these slaves, who bring the plagues on Khem, but it is that strange Goddess, the False Hathor, who dwells here in the city of Tanis. Be not so fearful—ever hadst thou a coward heart. Drive the False Hathor hence if thou wilt, but hold these slaves to their bondage. I still have cities that must be built, and yon slaves shall build them.”

Then the Pharaoh cried: “Hence! I bid you. Hence, and to-morrow shall your people be laden with a double burden and their backs shall be red with stripes. I will not let the people go!”

Then the two men cried aloud, and pointing upward with their staffs they vanished from the hall, and none dared to lay hands on them, but those who sat at the feast murmured much.

Now the Wanderer marvelled why Pharaoh did not command the Guards to cut down these

unbidden guests, who spoiled his festival. The Queen Meriamun saw the wonder in his eyes and turned to him.

“Know thou, Eperitus,” she said, “that great plagues have come of late on this land of ours—plagues of lice and frogs and flies and darkness, and the changing of pure waters to blood. And these things our Lord the Pharaoh deems have been brought upon us by the curse of yonder magicians, conjurers and priests among certain slaves who work in the land at the building of our cities. But I know well that the curses come on us from Hathor, the Lady of Love, because of that woman who hath set herself up here in Tanis, and is worshipped as the Hathor.”

“Why then, O Queen,” said the Wanderer, “is this false Goddess suffered to abide in your fair city? for, as I know well, the immortal Gods are ever angered with those who turn from their worship to bow before strange altars.”

“Why is she suffered? Nay, ask of Pharaoh

my Lord. Methinks it is because her beauty is more than the beauty of women, so the men say who have looked on it, but I have not seen it, for only those men see it who go to worship at her shrine, and then from afar. It is not meet that the Queen of all the Lands should worship at the shrine of a strange woman, come—like thyself, Eperitus—from none knows where: if indeed she be a woman and not a fiend from the Under World. But if thou wouldest learn more, ask my Lord the Pharaoh, for he knows the Shrine of the False Hathor, and he knows who guard it, and what is it that bars the way.”

Now the Wanderer turned to Pharaoh saying: “O Pharaoh, may I know the truth of this mystery?”

Then Meneptah looked up, and there was doubt and trouble on his heavy face.

“I will tell thee readily, thou Wanderer, for perchance such a man as thou, who hast travelled in many lands and seen the faces of many Gods,

may understand the tale, and may help me. In the days of my father, the holy Rameses Miamun, the keepers of the Temple of the Divine Hathor awoke, and lo! in the Sanctuary of the temple was a woman in the garb of the Aquaiusha, who was Beauty's self. But when they looked upon her, none could tell the semblance of her beauty, for to one she seemed dark and to the other fair, and to each man of them she showed a diverse loveliness. She smiled upon them, and sang most sweetly, and love entered their hearts, so that it seemed to each man that she only was his Heart's Desire. But when any man would have come nearer and embraced her, there was that about her which drove him back, and if he strove again, behold, he fell down dead. So at last they subdued their hearts, and desired her no more, but worshipped her as the Hathor come to earth, and made offerings of food and drink to her, and prayers. So three years passed, and at the end of the third year the keepers of the

temple looked and the Hathor was gone. Nothing remained of her but a memory. Yet there were some who said that this memory was dearer than all else that the world has to give.

“Twenty more seasons went by, and I sat upon the throne of my father, and was Lord of the Double Crown. And, on a day, a messenger came running and cried:

“‘Now is Hathor come back to Khem, now is Hathor come back to Khem, and, as of old, none may draw near her beauty!’ Then I went to see, and lo! before the Temple of Hathor a great multitude was gathered, and there on the pylon brow stood the Hathor’s self shining with changeful beauty like the Dawn. And as of old she sang sweet songs, and, to each man who heard, her voice was the voice of his own beloved, living and lost to him, or dead and lost. Now every man has such a grave in his heart as that whence Hathor seems to rise in changeful beauty. Month by month she sings thus, one

day in every month, and many a man has sought to win her and her favour, but in the doorways are they who meet him and press him back; and if he still struggles on, there comes a clang of swords and he falls dead, but no wound is found on him. And, Wanderer, this is truth, for I myself have striven and have been pressed back by that which guards her. But I alone of men who have looked on her and heard her, strove not a second time, and so saved myself alive."

"Thou alone of men lovest life more than the World's Desire!" said the Queen. "Thou hast ever sickened for the love of this strange Witch, but thy life thou lovest even better than her beauty, and thou dost not dare attempt again the adventure of her embrace. Know, Eperitus, that this sorrow is come upon the land, that all men love yonder witch and rave of her, and to each she wears a different face and sings in another voice. When she stands upon the pylon tower, then thou wilt see the madness with which she

has smitten them. For they will weep and pray and tear their hair. Then they will rush through the temple courts and up to the temple doors, and be thrust back again by that which guards her. But some will yet strive madly on, and thou wilt hear the clash of arms and they will fall dead before thee. Accursed is the land, I tell thee, Wanderer; because of that Phantom it is accursed. For it is she who brings these woes on Khem; from her, not from our slaves and their mad conjurers, come plagues, I say, and all evil things. And till a man be found who may pass her guard, and come face to face with the witch and slay her, plagues and woes and evil things shall be the daily bread of Khem. Perchance, Wanderer, thou art such a man," and she looked on him strangely. "Yet if so, this is my counsel, that thou go not up against her, lest thou also be bewitched, and a great man be lost to us."

Now the Wanderer turned the matter over in his heart and made answer:

“Perchance, Lady, my strength and the favour of the Gods might serve me in such a quest. But methinks that this woman is meeter for words of love and the kisses of men than to be slain with the sharp sword, if, indeed, she be not of the number of the immortals.”

Now Meriamun flushed and frowned.

“It is not fitting so to talk before me,” she said. “Of this be sure, that if the Witch may be come at, she shall be slain and given to Osiris for a bride.”

Now the Wanderer saw that the Lady Meriamun was jealous of the beauty and renown and love of her who dwelt in the temple, and was called the Strange Hathor, and he held his peace, for he knew when to be silent.

CHAPTER II.

THE NIGHT OF DREAD.

THE feast dragged slowly on, for Fear was of the company. The men and women were silent, and when they drank, it was as if one had poured a little oil on a dying fire. Life flamed up in them for a moment, their laughter came like the crackling of thorns, and then they were silent again. Meanwhile the Wanderer drank little, waiting to see what should come. But the Queen was watching him whom already her heart desired, and she only of all the company had pleasure in this banquet. Suddenly a side-door opened behind the daïs, there was a stir in the hall, each guest turning his head fearfully, for all expected some evil tidings. But it was only the entrance of those who bear about in the feasts of Egypt

an effigy of the Dead, the likeness of a mummy carved in wood, and who cry; "Drink, O King, and be glad, thou shalt soon be even as he! Drink, and be glad." The stiff, swathed figure, with its folded hands and gilded face, was brought before the Pharaoh, and Meneptah, who had sat long in sullen brooding silence, started when he looked on it. Then he broke into an angry laugh.

"We have little need of thee to-night," he cried, as he saluted the symbol of Osiris. "Death is near enough, we want not thy silent preaching. Death, Death is near!"

He fell back in his gilded chair, and let the cup drop from his hand, gnawing his beard.

"Art thou a man?" spoke Meriamun, in a low clear voice; "are you men, and yet afraid of what comes to all? Is it only to-night that we first hear the name of Death? Remember the great Men-kau-ra, remember the old Pharaoh who built the Pyramid of Hir. He was just and kind,

and he feared the Gods, and for his reward they showed him Death, coming on him in six short years. Did he scowl and tremble, like all of you to-night, who are scared by the threats of slaves? Nay, he outwitted the Gods, he made night into day, he lived out twice his years, with revel and love and wine in the lamp-lit groves of persea trees. Come, my guests, let us be merry, if it be but for an hour. Drink, and be brave!"

"For once thou speakest well," said the King. "Drink and forget; the Gods who give Death give wine," and his angry eyes ranged through the hall, to seek some occasion of mirth and scorn.

"Thou Wanderer!" he said, suddenly. "Thou drinkest not: I have watched thee as the cups go round; what, man, thou comest from the North, the sun of thy pale land has not heat enough to foster the vine. Thou seemest cold, and a drinker of water; why wilt thou be cold before thine hour? Come, pledge me in the red wine of Khem. Bring forth the cup of Pasht!" he

cried to them who waited, "bring forth the cup of Pasht, the King drinks!"

Then the chief butler of Pharaoh went to the treasure-house, and came again, bearing a huge golden cup, fashioned in the form of a lion's head, and holding twelve measures of wine. It was an ancient cup, sacred to Pasht, and a gift of the Rutennu to Thothmes, the greatest of that name.

"Fill it full of unmixed wine!" cried the King. "Dost thou grow pale at the sight of the cup, thou Wanderer from the North? I pledge thee, pledge thou me!"

"Nay, King," said the Wanderer, "I have tasted wine of Ismarus before to-day, and I have drunk with a wild host, the one-eyed Man Eater!" For his heart was angered by the King and he forgot his wisdom, but the Queen marked the saying.

"Then pledge me in the cup of Pasht!" quoth the King.

"I pray thee, pardon me," said the Wanderer,

"for wine makes wise men foolish and strong men weak, and to-night methinks we shall need our wits and our strength."

"Craven!" cried the King, "give me the bowl. I drink to thy better courage, Wanderer," and lifting the great golden cup, he stood up and drank it, and then dropped staggering into his chair, his head fallen on his breast.

"I may not refuse a King's challenge, though it is ill to contend with our hosts," said the Wanderer, turning somewhat pale, for he was in anger. "Give me the bowl!"

He took the cup, and held it high; then pouring a little forth to his Gods, he said, in a clear voice, for he was stirred to anger beyond his wont:

"I drink to the Strange Hathor!"

He spoke, and drained the mighty cup, and set it down on the board, and even as he laid down the cup, and as the Queen looked at him with eyes of wrath, there came from the bow be-

side his seat a faint shrill sound, a ringing and a singing of the bow, a noise of running strings and a sound as of rushing arrows.

The warrior heard it, and his eyes burned with the light of battle, for he knew well that the swift shafts should soon fly to the hearts of the doomed. Pharaoh awoke and heard it, and heard it the Lady Meriamun the Queen, and she looked on the Wanderer astonished, and looked on the bow that sang.

"The minstrel's tale was true! This is none other but the Bow of Odysseus, the sacker of cities," said Meriamun. "Hearken thou, Eperitus, thy great bow sings aloud. How comes it that thy bow sings?"

"For this cause, Queen," said the Wanderer; "because birds gather on the Bridge of War. Soon shall shafts be flying and ghosts go down to doom. Summon thy Guards, I bid thee, for foes are near."

Terror conquered the drunkenness of Pharaoh; he bade the Guards who stood behind his chair summon all their company. They went forth, and a great hush fell again upon the Hall of Banquets and upon those who sat at meat therein. The silence grew deadly still, like air before the thunder, and men's hearts sank within them, and turned to water in their breasts. Only Odysseus wondered and thought on the battle to be, though whence the foe might come he knew not, and Meriamun sat erect in her ivory chair and looked down the glorious hall.

Deeper grew the silence and deeper yet, and more and more the cloud of fear gathered in the hearts of men. Then suddenly through all the hall there was a rush like the rush of mighty wings. The deep foundations of the Palace rocked, and to the sight of men the roof above seemed to burst asunder, and lo! above them, against the distance of the sky, there swept a shape of Fear, and the stars shone through its raiment.

Then the roof closed in again, and for a moment's space once more there was silence, whilst men looked with white faces, each on each, and even the stout heart of the Wanderer stood still.

Then suddenly all adown the hall, from this place and from that, men rose up and with one great cry fell down dead, this one across the board, and that one on the floor. The Wanderer grasped his bow and counted. From among those who sat at meat twenty and one had fallen dead. Yet those who lived sat gazing emptily, for so stricken with fear were they that scarce did each one know if it was he himself who lay dead or his brother who had sat by his side.

But Meriamun looked down the hall with cold eyes, for she feared neither Death nor Life, nor God nor man.

And while she looked and while the Wanderer counted, there rose a faint murmuring sound

from the city without, a sound that grew and grew, the thunder of myriad feet that run before the death of kings. Then the doors burst asunder and a woman sped through them in her night robes, and in her arms she bore the naked body of a boy.

“Pharaoh!” she cried, “Pharaoh, and thou, O Queen, look upon thy son—thy firstborn son—dead is thy son, O Pharaoh! Dead is thy son, O Queen! In my arms he died suddenly as I lulled him to his rest,” and she laid the body of the child down on the board among the vessels of gold, among the garlands of lotus flowers and the beakers of rose-red wine.

Then Pharaoh rose and rent his purple robes and wept aloud. Meriamun rose too, and lifting the body of her son clasped it to her breast, and her eyes were terrible with wrath and grief, but she wept not.

“See now the curse that this evil woman,

this False Hathor, hath brought upon us," she said.

But the very guests sprang up crying, "It is not the Hathor whom we worship, it is not the Holy Hathor, it is the Gods of those dark Apura whom thou, O Queen, wilt not let go. On thy head and the head of Pharaoh be it," and even as they cried the murmur without grew to a shriek of woe, a shriek so wild and terrible that the Palace walls rang. Again that shriek rose, and yet a third time, never was such a cry heard in Egypt. And now for the first time in all his days the face of the Wanderer grew white with fear, and in fear of heart he prayed for succour to his Goddess—to Aphrodite, the daughter of Dione.

Again the doors behind them burst open and the Guards flocked in—mighty men of many foreign lands; but now their faces were wan, their eyes stared wide, and their jaws hung down. But at the sound of the clanging of their harness

the strength of the Wanderer came back to him again, for the Gods and their vengeance he feared, but not the sword of man. And now once more the bow sang aloud. He grasped it, he bent it with his mighty knee, and strung it, crying:

“Awake, Pharaoh, awake! Foes draw on. Say, be these all the men?”

Then the Captain answered, “These be all of the Guard who are left living in the Palace. The rest are stark, smitten by the angry Gods.”

Now as the Captain spake, one came running up the hall, heeding neither the dead nor the living. It was the old priest Rei, the Commander of the Legion of Amen, who had been the Wanderer's guide, and his looks were wild with fear.

“Hearken, Pharaoh!” he cried, “thy people lie dead by thousands in the streets—the houses are full of dead. In the Temples of Ptah and of Amen many of the priests have fallen dead also.”

"Hast thou more to tell, old man?" cried the Queen.

"The tale has not all been told, O Queen. The soldiers are mad with fear and with the sight of death, and slay their captains; barely have I escaped from those in my command of the Legion of Amen. For they swear that this death has been brought upon the land because Pharaoh will not let the Apura go. Hither, then, they come to slay Pharaoh, and thee also, O Queen, and with them come many thousands of people, catching up such arms as lie to their hands."

Now Pharaoh sank down groaning, but the Queen spake to the Wanderer:

"Anon thy weapon sang of war, Eperitus; now war is at the gates."

"Little I fear the rush of battle and the blows men deal in anger, Lady," he made answer, "though a man may fear the Gods without shame. Ho, Guards! close up, close up round

me! Look not so pale-faced now death from the Gods is done with, and we have but to fear the sword of men."

So great was his mien and so glorious his face as he cried thus, and one by one drew his long arrows forth and laid them on the board, that the trembling Guards took heart, and to the number of fifty and one ranged themselves on the edge of the dais in a double line. Then they also made ready their bows and loosened the arrows in their quivers.

Now from without there came a roar of men, and anon, while those of the house of Pharaoh, and of the guests and nobles, who sat at the feast and yet lived, fled behind the soldiers, the brazen doors were burst in with mighty blows, and through them a great armed multitude surged along the hall. There came soldiers broken from their ranks. There came the embalmers of the Dead; their hands were overfull of work to-night, but they left their work undone; Death

had smitten some even of these, and their fellows did not shrink back from them now. There came the smith, black from the forge, and the scribe bowed with endless writing; and the dyer with his purple hands, and the fisher from the stream; and the stunted weaver from the loom, and the leper from the Temple gates. They were mad with lust of life, a starveling life that the King had taxed, when he let not the Apura go. They were mad with fear of death; their women followed them with dead children in their arms. They smote down the golden furnishings, they tore the silken hangings, they cast the empty cups of the feast at the faces of trembling ladies, and cried aloud for the blood of the King.

“Where is Pharaoh?” they yelled, “show us Pharaoh and the Queen Meriamun, that we may slay them. Dead are our firstborn, they lie in heaps as the fish lay when Sihor ran red with blood. Dead are they because of the curse that has been brought upon us by the prophets of

the Apura, whom Pharaoh, and Pharaoh's Queen, yet hold in Khem."

Now as they cried they saw Pharaoh Meneptah cowering behind the double line of Guards, and they saw the Queen Meriamun who cowered not, but stood silent above the din. Then she thrust her way through the Guards, and yet holding the body of the child to her breast, she stood before them with eyes that flashed more brightly than the uraeus crown upon her brow.

"Back!" she cried, "back! It is not Pharaoh, it is not I, who have brought this death upon you. For we too have death here!" and she held up the body of her dead son. "It is that False Hathor whom ye worship, that Witch of many a voice and many a face who turns your hearts faint with love. For her sake ye endure these woes, on her head is all this death. Go, tear her temple stone from stone, and rend her beauty limb from limb, and be avenged and free the land from curses."

A moment the people stood and hearkened, muttering, as stands the lion that is about to spring, while those who pressed without cried: "Forward! Forward! Slay them! Slay them!" Then as with one voice they screamed:

"The Hathor we love, but you we hate, for ye have brought these woes upon us, and ye shall die."

They cried, they brawled, they cast footstools and stones at the Guards, and then a certain tall man among them drew a bow. Straight at the Queen's fair breast he aimed his arrow, and swift and true it sped toward her. She saw the light gleam upon its shining barb, and then she did what no woman but Meriamun would have done, no, not to save herself from death—she held out the naked body of her son as a warrior holds a shield. The arrow struck through and through it, piercing the tender flesh, aye, and pricked her breast beyond, so that she let the dead boy fall.

The Wanderer saw it and wondered at the horror of the deed, for he had seen no such deed in all his days. Then shouting aloud the terrible war-cry of the Achæans he leapt upon the board before him, and as he leapt his golden armour clanged.

Glancing around, he fixed an arrow to the string and drew to his ear that great bow which none but he might so much as bend. Then as he loosed, the string sang like a swallow, and the shaft screamed through the air. Down the glorious hall it sped, and full on the breast of him who had lifted bow against the Queen the bitter arrow struck, nor might his harness avail to stay it. Through the body of him it passed and with blood-red feathers flew on, and smote another who stood behind him so that his knees also were loosened, and together they fell dead upon the floor.

Now while the people stared and wondered, again the bow-string sang like a swallow, again

the arrow screamed in its flight, and he who stood before it got his death, for the shield he bore was pinned to his breast.

Then wonder turned to rage; the multitude rolled forward, and from either side the air grew dark with arrows. For the Guards at sight of the shooting of the Wanderer found heart and fought well and manfully. Boldly also the slayers came on, and behind them pressed many a hundred men. The Wanderer's golden helm flashed steadily, a beacon in the storm. Black smoke burst out in the hall, the hangings flamed and tossed in a wind from the open door. The lights were struck from the hands of the golden images, arrows stood thick in the tables and the rafters, a spear pierced through the golden cup of Pasht. But out of the darkness and smoke and dust, and the cry of battle, and through the rushing of the rain of spears, sang the swallow string of the black bow of Eurytus, and the long shafts shrieked as they sped on them who

were ripe to die. In vain did the arrows of the slayers smite upon that golden harness. They were but as hail upon the temple roofs, but as driving snow upon the wild stag's horns. They struck, they rattled, and down they dropped like snow, or bounded back and lay upon the board.

The swallow string sang, the black bow twanged, and the bitter arrows shrieked as they flew.

Now the Wanderer's shafts were spent, and he judged that their case was desperate. For out of the doors of the hall that were behind them, and from the chambers of the women, armed men burst in also, taking them on the flank and rear. But the Wanderer was old in war, and without a match in all its ways. The Captain of the Guard was slain with a spear stroke, and the Wanderer took his place, calling to the men, such of them as were left alive, to form a circle on the daïs, and within the circle

he set those of the house of Pharaoh and the women who were at the feast. And to Pharaoh he cast a slain man's sword, bidding him strike for life and throne if he never struck before; but the heart was out of Pharaoh because of the death of his son, and the wine about his wits, and the terrors he had seen. Then Meriamun the Queen snatched the sword from his trembling hand and stood holding it to guard her life. For she disdained to crouch upon the ground as did the other women, but stood upright behind the Wanderer, and heeded not the spears and arrows that dealt death on every hand. But Pharaoh stood, his face buried in his hands.

Now the slayers came on, shouting and clambering upon the daïs. Then the Wanderer rushed on them with sword drawn, and shield on high, and so swift he smote that men might not guard, for they saw, as it were, three blades aloft at once, and the silver-hafted sword bit deep, the gift of Phæacian Euryalus long ago. The Guards

also smote and thrust; it was for their lives they fought, and back rolled the tide of foes, leaving a swathe of dead. So a second time they came on, and a second time were rolled back.

Now of the defenders few were left unhurt, and their strength was well-nigh spent. But the Wanderer cheered them with great words, though his heart grew fearful for the end; and Meriamun the Queen also bade them to be of good courage, and if need were, to die like men. Then once again the wave of War rolled in upon them, and the strife grew fierce and desperate. The iron hedge of spears was well-nigh broken, and now the Wanderer, doing such deeds as had not been known in Khem, stood alone between Meriamun the Queen and the swords that thirsted for her life and the life of Pharaoh. Then of a sudden, from far down the great hall of banquets, there came a loud cry that shrilled above the clash of swords, the groans of men, and all the din of battle.

“*Pharaoh! Pharaoh! Pharaoh!*” rose a voice.
“Now wilt thou let the people go?”

Then he who smote stayed his hand and he who guarded dropped his shield. The battle ceased and all turned to look. There at the end of the hall, among the dead and dying, there stood the two ancient men of the Apura, and in their hands were cedar rods.

“It is the Wizards—the Wizards of the Apura,” men cried, and shrunk this way and that, thinking no more on war.

The ancient men drew nigh. They took no heed of the dying or the dead: on they walked, through blood and wine and fallen tables and scattered arms, till they stood before the Pharaoh.

“*Pharaoh! Pharaoh! Pharaoh!*” they cried again. “Dead are the first-born of Khem at the hand of Jahveh. Wilt thou let the people go?”

Then Pharaoh lifted his face and cried:

“Get you gone—you and all that is yours.

Get you gone swiftly, and let Khem see your face no more."

The people heard, and the living left the hall, and silence fell on the city, and on the dead who died of the sword, and the dead who died of the pestilence. Silence fell, and sleep, and the Gods' best gift—forgetfulness.

CHAPTER III.

THE BATHS OF BRONZE.

EVEN out of this night of dread the morning rose, and with it came Rei, bearing a message from the King. But he did not find the Wanderer in his chamber. The Palace eunuchs said that he had risen and had asked for Kurri, the Captain of the Sidonians, who was now the Queen's Jeweller. Thither Rei went, for Kurri was lodged with the servants in a court of the Royal House, and as the old man came he heard the sound of hammers beating on metal. There, in the shadow which the Palace wall cast into a little court, there was the Wanderer; no longer in his golden mail, but with bare arms, and dressed in such a light smock as the workmen of Khem were wont to wear.

The Wanderer was bending over a small brazier, whence a flame and a light blue smoke arose and melted into the morning light. In his hand he held a small hammer, and he had a little anvil by him, on which lay one of the golden shoulder-plates of his armour. The other pieces were heaped beside the brazier. Kurri, the Sidonian, stood beside him, with graving tools in his hands.

"Hail to thee, Eperitus," cried Rei, calling him by the name he had chosen to give himself. "What makest thou here with fire and anvil?"

"I am but furbishing up my armour," said the Wanderer, smiling. "It has more than one dint from the fight in the hall;" and he pointed to his shield, which was deeply scarred across the blazon of the White Bull, the cognizance of dead Paris, Priam's son. "Sidonian, blow up the fire."

Kurri crouched on his hams and blew the

blaze to a white heat with a pair of leathern bellows, while the Wanderer fitted the plates and hammered at them on the anvil, making the jointures smooth and strong, talking meanwhile with Rei.

“Strange work for a prince, as thou must be in Alybas, whence thou comest,” quoth Rei, leaning on his long rod of cedar, headed with an apple of bluestone. “In our country chiefs do not labour with their hands.”

“Different lands, different ways,” answered Eperitus. “In my country men wed not their sisters as your kings do, though, indeed, it comes into my mind that once I met such brides in my wanderings in the isle of the King of the Winds.”

For the thought of the Æolian isle, where King Æolus gave him all the winds in a bag, came into his memory.

“My hands can serve me in every need,” he went on. “Mowing the deep green grass in

spring, or driving oxen, or cutting a clean furrow with the plough in heavy soil, or building houses and ships, or doing smith's work with gold and bronze and gray iron—they are all one to me.”

“Or the work of war,” said Rei. “For there I have seen thee labour. Now, listen, thou Wanderer, the King Meneptah and the Queen Meriamun send me to thee with this scroll of their will,” and he drew forth a roll of papyrus, bound with golden threads, and held it on his forehead, bowing, as if he prayed.

“What is that roll of thine?” said the Wanderer, who was hammering at the bronze spear-point, that stood fast in his helm.

Rei undid the golden threads and opened the scroll, which he gave into the Wanderer's hand.

“Gods! What have we here?” said the Wanderer. “Here are pictures, tiny and cunningly drawn, serpents in red, and little figures of men sitting or standing, axes and snakes and birds

and beetles! My father, what tokens are these?" and he gave the scroll back to Rei.

"The King has made his Chief Scribe write to thee, naming thee Captain of the Legion of Pasht, the Guard of the Royal House, for last night the Captain was slain. He gives thee a high title, and he promises thee houses, lands, and a city of the South to furnish thee with wine, and a city of the North to furnish thee with corn, if thou wilt be his servant."

"Never have I served any man," said the Wanderer, flushing red, "though I went near to being sold and to knowing the day of slavery. The King does me too much honour."

"Thou wouldest fain begone from Khem?" asked the old man, eagerly.

"I would fain find her I came to seek, wherever she be," said the Wanderer. "Here or elsewhere."

"Then, what answer shall I carry to the King?"

"Time brings thought," said the Wanderer; "I would see the city if thou wilt guide me. Many cities have I seen, but none so great as this. As we walk I will consider my answer to your King."

He had been working at his helm as he spoke, for the rest of his armour was now mended. He had drawn out the sharp spear-head of bronze, and was balancing it in his hand and trying its edge.

"A good blade," he said; "better was never hammered. It went near to doing its work, Sidonian," and he turned to Kurri as he spoke. "Two things of thine I had: thy life and thy spear-point. Thy life I gave thee, thy spear-point thou didst lend me. Here, take it again," and he tossed the spear-head to the Queen's Jeweller.

"I thank thee, lord," answered the Sidonian, thrusting it in his girdle; but he muttered between his teeth, "The gifts of enemies are gifts of evil."

The Wanderer did on his mail, set the helmet on his head, and spoke to Rei. "Come forth, friend, and show me thy city."

But Rei was watching the smile on the face of the Sidonian, and he deemed it cruel and crafty and warlike, like the laugh of the Sardana of the sea. He said nought, but called a guard of soldiers, and with the Wanderer he passed the Palace gates and went out into the city.

The sight was strange, and it was not thus that the old man, who loved his land, would have had the Wanderer see it.

From all the wealthy houses, and from many of the poorer sort, rang the wail of the women mourners as they sang their dirges for the dead.

But in the meaner quarters many a hovel was marked with three smears of blood, dashed on each pillar of the door and on the lintel; and the sound that came from these dwellings was the cry of mirth and festival. There were two peoples; one laughed, one lamented. And in and

out of the houses marked with the splashes of blood women were ever going with empty hands, or coming with hands full of jewels, of gold, of silver rings, of cups, and purple stuffs. Empty they went out, laden they came in, dark men and women with keen black eyes and the features of birds of prey. They went, they came, they clamoured with delight among the mourning of the men and women of Khem, and none laid a hand on them, none refused them.

One tall fellow snatched at the staff of Rei.

"Lend me thy staff, old man," he said, sneering; "lend me thy jewelled staff for my journey. I do but borrow it; when Yakûb comes from the desert thou shalt have it again."

But the Wanderer turned on the fellow with such a glance that he fell back.

"I have seen *thee* before," he said, and he laughed over his shoulder as he went; "I saw thee last night at the feast, and heard thy great bow sing. Thou art not of the folk of Khem.

They are a gentle folk, and Yakûb wins favour in their sight."

"What passes now in this haunted land of thine, old man?" said the Wanderer, "for of all the sights that I have seen, this is the strangest. None lifts a hand to save his goods from the thief."

Rei the Priest groaned aloud.

"Evil days have come upon Khem," he said. "The Apura spoil the people of Khem ere they fly into the Wilderness."

Even as he spoke there came a great lady weeping, for her husband was dead, and her son and her brother, all were gone in the breath of the pestilence. She was of the Royal House, and richly decked with gold and jewels, and the slaves who fanned her, as she went to the Temple of Ptah to worship, wore gold chains upon their necks. Two women of the Apura saw her and ran to her, crying:

"Lend to us those golden ornaments thou wearest."

Then, without a word, she took her gold bracelets and chains and rings, and let them all fall in a heap at her feet. The women of the Apura took them all and mocked her, crying:

"Where now is thy husband and thy son and thy brother, thou who art of Pharaoh's house? Now thou payest us for the labour of our hands and for the bricks that we made without straw, gathering leaves and rushes in the sun. Now thou payest for the stick in the hand of the overseers. Where now is thy husband and thy son and thy brother?" and they went still mocking, and left the lady weeping.

But of all sights the Wanderer held this the strangest, and many such there were to see. At first he would have taken back the spoil and given it to those who wore it, but Rei the Priest prayed him to forbear, lest the curse should strike them also. So they pressed on through the tumult,

ever seeing new sights of greed and death and sorrow. Here a mother wept over her babe, here a bride over her husband—that night the groom of her and of death. Here the fierce-faced Apura, clamouring like gulls, tore the silver trinkets from the children of those of the baser sort, or the sacred amulets from the mummies of those who were laid out for burial, and here a water-carrier wailed over the carcass of the ass that won him his livelihood.

At length, passing through the crowd, they came to a temple that stood near to the Temple of the God Ptah. The pylons of this temple faced towards the houses of the city, but the inner courts were built against the walls of Tanis and looked out across the face of the water. Though not one of the largest temples, it was very strong and beautiful in its shape. It was built of the black stone of Syene, and all the polished face of the stone was graven with images of the Holy Hathor. Here she wore a cow's head,

and here the face of a woman, but she always bore in her hands the lotus-headed staff and the holy token of life, and her neck was encircled with the collar of the gods.

"Here dwells that Strange Hathor to whom thou didst drink last night, Eperitus," said Rei the Priest. "It was a wild pledge to drink before the Queen, who swears that she brings these woes on Khem. Though, indeed, she is guiltless of this, with all the blood on her beautiful head. The Apura and their apostate sorcerer, whom we ourselves instructed, bring the plagues on us."

"Does the Hathor manifest herself this day?" asked the Wanderer.

"That we will ask of the priests, Eperitus. Follow thou me."

Now they passed down the avenue of sphinxes within the wall of brick, into the garden plot of the Goddess, and so on through the gates of the outer tower. A priest who watched there threw them wide at the sign that was given of Rei, the

Master Builder, the beloved of Pharaoh, and they came to the outer court. Before the second tower they halted, and Rei showed to the Wanderer that place upon the pylon roof where the Hathor was wont to stand and sing till the hearers' hearts were melted like wax. Here they knocked once more, and were admitted to the Hall of Assembly where the priests were gathered, throwing dust upon their heads and mourning those among them who had died with the First-born. When they saw Rei, the instructed, the Prophet of Amen, and the Wanderer clad in golden armour who was with him, they ceased from their mourning, and an ancient priest of their number came forward, and, greeting Rei, asked him of his errand. Then Rei took the Wanderer by the hand and made him known to the priest, and told him of those deeds that he had done, and how he had saved the life of Pharaoh and of those of the Royal House who sat at the feast with Pharaoh.

"But when will the Lady Hathor sing upon her tower top?" said Rei, "for the Stranger desires to see her and hear her."

The temple priest bowed before the Wanderer, and answered gravely:

"On the third morn from now the Holy Hathor shows herself upon the temple's top," he said; "but thou, mighty lord, who art risen from the sea, hearken to my warning, and if, indeed, thou art no god, dare not to look upon her beauty. If thou dost look, then thy fate shall be as the fate of those who have looked before, and have loved and have died for the sake of the Hathor."

"No god am I," said the Wanderer, laughing, "yet, perchance, I shall dare to look, and dare to face whatever it be that guards her, if my heart bids me see her nearer."

"Then there shall be an end of thee and thy wanderings," said the priest. "Now follow me,

and I will show thee those men who last sought to win the Hathor."

He took him by the hand and led him through passages hewn in the walls till they came to a deep and gloomy cell, where the golden armour of the Wanderer shone like a lamp at eve. The cell was built against the city wall, and scarcely a thread of light came into the chink between roof and wall. All about the chamber were baths fashioned of bronze, and in the baths lay dusky shapes of dark-skinned men of Egypt. There they lay, and in the faint light their limbs were being anointed by some sad-faced attendants, as folk were anointed by merry girls in the shining baths of the Wanderer's home. When Rei and Eperitus came near, the sad-faced bath-men shrank away in shame, as dogs shrink from their evil meal at night when a traveller goes past.

Marvelling at the strange sight, the bathers and the bathed, the Wanderer looked more

closely and his stout heart sank within him. For all these were dead who lay in the baths of bronze, and it was not water that flowed about their limbs, but evil-smelling natron.

"Here lie those," said the priest, "who last strove to come near the Holy Hathor, and to pass into the shrine of the temple where night and day she sits and sings and weaves with her golden shuttle. Here they lie, the half of a score. One by one they rushed to embrace her, and one by one they were smitten down. Here they are being attired for the tomb, for we give them all rich burial."

"Truly," quoth the Wanderer, "I left the world of Light behind me when I looked on the blood-red sea and sailed into the black gloom off Pharos. More evil sights have I seen in this haunted land than in all the cities where I have wandered, and on all the seas that I have sailed."

"Then be warned," said the priest, "for if

thou dost follow where they went, and desire what they desired, thou too shalt lie in yonder bath, and be washed of yonder waters. For whatever be false, this is true, that he who seeks love oftentimes finds doom. But here he finds it most speedily."

The Wanderer looked again at the dead and at their ministers, and he shuddered till his harness rattled. He feared not the face of Death in war, or on the sea, but this was a new thing. Little he loved the sight of the brazen baths and those who lay there. The light of the sun and the breath of air seemed good to him, and he stepped quickly from the chamber, while the priest smiled to himself. But when he reached the outer air, his heart came back to him, and he began to ask again about the Hathor—where she dwelt, and what it was that slew her lovers.

"I will show thee," answered the priest, and brought him through the Hall of Assembly to a certain narrow way that led to a court. In the

centre of the court stood the holy shrine of the Hathor. It was a great chamber, built of alabaster, lighted from the roof alone, and shut in with brazen doors, before which hung curtains of Tyrian web. From the roof of the shrine a stairway ran overhead to the roof of the temple and so to the inner pylon tower.

“Yonder, Stranger, the holy Goddess dwells within the Alabaster Shrine,” said the priest. “By that stair she passes to the temple roof, and thence to the pylon top. There by the curtains, once in every day, we place food, and it is drawn into the sanctuary, how we know not, for none of us have set foot there, nor seen the Hathor face to face. Now, when the Goddess has stood upon the pylon and sung to the multitude below, she passes back to the shrine. Then the brazen outer doors of the temple court are thrown wide and the doomed rush on madly, one by one, towards the drawn curtains. But before they pass the curtains they are thrust

back, yet they strive to pass. Then we hear a sound of the clashing of weapons and the men fall dead without a word, while the song of the Hathor swells from within."

"And who are her swordsmen?" said the Wanderer.

"That we know not, Stranger; no man has lived to tell. Come, draw near to the door of the shrine and hearken, maybe thou wilt hear the Hathor singing. Have no fear; thou needst not approach the guarded space."

Then the Wanderer drew near with a doubting heart, but Rei the Priest stood afar off, though the temple priests came close enough. At the curtains they stopped and listened. Then from within the shrine there came a sound of singing wild and sweet and shrill, and the voice of it stirred the Wanderer strangely, bringing to his mind memories of that Ithaca of which he was Lord and which he should see no more; of the happy days of youth, and of the God-built

walls of windy Ilios. But he could not have told why he thought on these things, nor why his heart was thus strangely stirred within him.

"Hearken! the Hathor sings as she weaves the doom of men," said the priest, and as he spoke the singing ended.

Then the Wanderer took counsel with himself whether he should then and there burst the doors and take his fortune, or whether he should forbear for that while. But in the end he determined to forbear and see with his own eyes what befell those who strove to win the way.

So he drew back, wondering much; and, bidding farewell to the aged priest, he went with Rei, the Master Builder, through the town of Tanis, where the Apura were still spoiling the people of Khem, and he came to the Palace where he was lodged. Here he turned over in his mind how he might see the strange woman of the temple, and yet escape the baths of bronze. There he sat and thought till at length the night

drew on, and one came to summon him to sup with Pharaoh in the Hall. Then he rose up and went, and meeting Pharaoh and Meriamun the Queen in the outer chamber, passed in after them to the Hall, and on to that daïs which he had held against the rabble, for the place was clear of dead, and, save for certain stains upon the marble floor that might not be washed away, and for some few arrows that yet were fixed high up in the walls or in the lofty roof, there was nothing to tell of the great fray that had been fought but one day gone.

Heavy was the face of Pharaoh, and the few who sat with him were sad enough because of the death of so many whom they loved, and the shame and sorrow that had fallen upon Khem. But there were no tears for her one child in the eyes of Meriamun the Queen. Anger, not grief, tore her heart because Pharaoh had let the Apura go. For ever as they sat at the sad feast there came a sound of the tramping feet of

armies, and of lowing cattle, and songs of triumph, sung by ten thousand voices, and thus they sang the song of the Apura:—

A lamp for our feet the Lord hath litten,
Signs hath He shown in the Land of Khem.
The Kings of the Nations our Lord hath smitten,
His shoe hath He cast o'er the Gods of them.
He hath made Him a mock of the heifer of Isis,
He hath broken the chariot reins of Ra,
On Yakûb He cries, and His folk arises,
And the knees of the Nations are loosed in awe.

He gives us their goods for a spoil to gather,
Jewels of silver, and vessels of gold;
For Yahveh of old is our Friend and Father,
And cherisheth Yakûb He chose of old.
The Gods of the Peoples our Lord hath chidden,
Their courts hath He filled with His creeping things;
The light of the face of the Sun He hath hidden,
And broken the scourge in the hands of kings.

He hath chastened His people with stripes and scourges,
Our backs hath He burdened with grievous weights,
But His children shall rise as a sea that surges,
And flood the fields of the men He hates.
The Kings of the Nations our Lord hath smitten,
His shoe hath He cast o'er the Gods of them,

But a lamp for our feet the Lord hath litten,
Wonders hath wrought in the Land of Khem.

Thus they sang, and the singing was so wild that the Wanderer craved leave to go and stand at the Palace gate, lest the Apura should rush in and spoil the treasure-chamber.

The King nodded, but Meriamun rose, and went with the Wanderer as he took his bow and passed to the great gates.

There they stood in the shadow of the gates, and this is what they beheld. A great light of many torches was flaring along the roadway in front. Then came a body of men, rudely armed with pikes, and the torch-light shone on the glitter of bronze and on the gold helms of which they had spoiled the soldiers of Khem. Next came a troop of wild women, dancing, and beating timbrels, and singing the triumphant hymn of scorn.

Next, with a space between, tramped eight strong black-bearded men, bearing on their

shoulders a great gilded coffin, covered with carven and painted signs.

"It is the body of their Prophet, who brought them hither out of their land of hunger," whispered Meriamun. "Slaves, ye shall hunger yet in the wilderness, and clamour for the flesh-pots of Khem!"

Then she cried in a loud voice, for her passion overcame her, and she prophesied to those who bare the coffin, "Not one soul of you that lives shall see the land where your conjurer is leading you! Ye shall thirst, ye shall hunger, ye shall call on the Gods of Khem, and they shall not hear you; ye shall die, and your bones shall whiten the wilderness. Farewell! Set go with you. Farewell!"

So she cried and pointed down the way, and so fierce was her gaze, and so awful were her words, that the people of the Apura trembled and the women ceased to sing.

The Wanderer watched the Queen and

marvelled. "Never had woman such a hardy heart," he mused; "and it were ill to cross her in love or war!"

"They will sing no more at my gates," murmured Meriamun, with a smile. "Come, Wanderer; they await us," and she gave him her hand that he might lead her.

So they went back to the banquet hall.

They hearkened as they sat till far in the night, and still the Apura passed, countless as the sands of the sea. At length all were gone and the sound of their feet died away in the distance. Then Meriamun the Queen turned to Pharaoh and spake bitterly:

"Thou art a coward, Menepthah, ay, a coward and a slave at heart. In thy fear of the curse that the False Hathor hath laid on us, she whom thou dost worship, to thy shame, thou hast let these slaves go. Otherwise had our father dealt with them, great Rameses Miamun, the hammer of the Khita. Now they are gone hissing curses

on the land that bare them, and robbing those who nursed them up while they were yet a little people, as a mother nurses her child."

"What then might I do?" said Pharaoh.

"There is nought to do; all is done," answered Meriamun. "What is thy counsel, Wanderer?"

"It is ill for a stranger to offer counsel," said the Wanderer.

"Nay, speak," cried the Queen.

"I know not the Gods of this land," he answered. "If these people be favoured of the Gods, I say sit still. But if not," then said the Wanderer, wise in war, "let Pharaoh gather his host, follow after the people, take them unawares, and smite them utterly. It is no hard task, they are so mixed a multitude and cumbered with much baggage!"

This was to speak as the Queen loved to hear. Now she clapped her hands and cried:

"Listen, listen to good counsel, Pharaoh."

And now that the Apura were gone, his fear of them went also, and as he drank wine Pharaoh grew bold, till at last he sprang to his feet and swore by Amen, by Osiris, by Ptah, and by his father—great Rameses—that he would follow after the Apura and smite them. And instantly he sent forth messengers to summon the captains of his host in the Hall of Assembly.

Thither the captains came, and their plans were made and messengers hurried forth to the governors of other great cities, bidding them send troops to join the host of Pharaoh on its march.

Now Pharaoh turned to the Wanderer and said:

“Thou hast not yet answered my message that Rei carried to thee this morning. Wilt thou take service with me and be a captain in this war?”

The Wanderer little liked the name of service, but his warlike heart was stirred within him, for he loved the delight of battle. But be-

fore he could answer yea or nay, Meriamun the Queen, who was not minded that he should leave her, spoke hastily:

“This is my counsel, Meneptah, that the Lord Eperitus should abide here in Tanis and be the Captain of my Guard while thou art gone to smite the Apura. For I may not be here unguarded in these troublous times, and if I know he watches over me, he who is so mighty a man, then I shall walk safely and sleep in peace.”

Now the Wanderer bethought him of his desire to look upon the Hathor, for to see new things and try new adventures was always his delight. So he answered that if it were pleasing to Pharaoh and the Queen he would willingly stay and command the Guard. And Pharaoh said that it should be so.

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER.

AT midday on the morrow Pharaoh and the host of Pharaoh marched in pomp from Tanis, taking the road that runs across the desert country towards the red Sea of Weeds, the way that the Apura had gone. The Wanderer went with the army for an hour's journey and more, in a chariot driven by Rei the Priest, for Rei did not march with the host. The number of the soldiers of Pharaoh amazed the Achæan, accustomed to the levies of barren isles and scattered tribes. But he said nothing of his wonder to Rei or any man, lest it should be thought that he came from among a little people. He even made as if he held the army lightly, and asked the priest if this was all the strength of Pharaoh! Then Rei told him that it was but

a fourth part, for none of the mercenaries and none of the soldiers from the Upper Land marched with the King in pursuit of the Apura.

Then the Wanderer knew that he was come among a greater people than he had ever encountered yet, on land or sea. So he went with them till the roads divided, and there he drove his chariot to the chariot of Pharaoh and bade him farewell. Pharaoh called to him to mount his own chariot, and spake thus to him:

“Swear to me, thou Wanderer, who namest thyself Eperitus, though of what country thou art and what was thy father’s house none know, swear to me that thou wilt guard Meriamun the Queen faithfully, and wilt work no woe upon me nor upon my house while I am afar. Great thou art and beautiful to look on, ay, and strong beyond the strength of men, yet my heart misdoubts me of thee. For methinks thou art a crafty man, and that evil will come upon me through thee.”

"If this be thy mind, Pharaoh," said the Wanderer, "leave me not in guard of the Queen. And yet methinks I did not befriend thee so ill two nights gone, when the rabble would have put thee and all thy house to the sword because of the death of the firstborn."

Now Pharaoh looked on him long and doubtfully, then stretched out his hand. The Wanderer took it, and swore by his own Gods, by Zeus, by Aphrodite, and Athene, and Apollo, that he would be true to the trust.

"I believe thee, Wanderer," said the Pharaoh. "Know this, if thou keepest thine oath thou shalt have great rewards, and thou shalt be second to none in the land of Khem, but if thou failest, then thou shalt die miserably."

"I ask no fee," answered the Wanderer, "and I fear no death, for in one way only shall I die, and that is known to me. Yet I will keep my oath." And he bowed before Pharaoh, and leap-

ing from his chariot entered again into the chariot of Rei.

Now, as he drove back through the host the soldiers called to him, saying:

"Leave us not, thou Wanderer." For he looked so glorious in his golden armour that it seemed to them as though a god departed from their ranks.

His heart was with them, for he loved war, and he did not love the Apura. But he drove on, as so it must be, and came to the Palace at sundown.

That night he sat at the feast by the side of Meriamun the Queen. And when the feast was done she bade him follow her into her chamber where she sat when she would be alone. It was a fragrant chamber, dimly lighted with sweet-scented lamps, furnished with couches of ivory and gold, while all the walls told painted stories of strange gods and kings, and of their loves and wars. The Queen sank back upon the em-

broidered cushions of a couch and bade the wise Odysseus sit over against her, so near that her robes swept his golden greaves. This he did somewhat against his will, though he was no hater of fair women. But his heart misdoubted the dark-eyed Queen, and he looked upon her guardedly, for she was strangely fair to see, the fairest of all mortal women whom he had known, save the Golden Helen.

“Wanderer, we owe thee great thanks, and I would gladly know to whom we are in debt for the prices of our lives,” she said. “Tell me of thy birth, of thy father’s house, and of the lands that thou hast seen and the wars wherein thou hast fought. Tell me also of the sack of Ilios, and how thou camest by thy golden mail. The unhappy Paris wore such arms as these, if the minstrel of the North sang truth.”

Now, the Wanderer would gladly have cursed this minstrel from the North and his songs.

“Minstrels will be lying, Lady,” he said, “and

they gather old tales wherever they go. Paris may have worn my arms, or another man. I bought them from a chapman in Crete, and asked nothing of their first master. As for Ilios, I fought there in my youth, and served the Cretan Idomeneus, but I got little booty. To the King the wealth and women, to us the sword-strokes. Such is the appearance of war."

Meriamun listened to his tale, which he set forth roughly, as if he were some blunt, grumbling swordsman, and darkly she looked on him while she hearkened, and darkly she smiled as she looked.

"A strange story, Eperitus, a strange story truly. Now tell me this. How camest thou by yonder great bow, the bow of the swallow string? If my minstrel spoke truly, it was once the Bow of Eurytus of Œchalia."

Now the Wanderer glanced round him like a man taken in ambush, who sees on every hand the sword of foes shine up into the sunlight.

"The bow, Lady?" he answered readily enough. "I got it strangely. I was cruising with a cargo of iron on the western coast and landed on an isle, methinks the pilot called it Ithaca. There we found nothing but death; a pestilence had been in the land, but in a ruined hall this bow was lying, and I made prize of it. A good bow!"

"A strange story, truly—a very strange story," quoth Meriamun the Queen. "By chance thou didst buy the armour of Paris, by chance thou didst find the bow of Eurytus, that bow, methinks, with which the god-like Odysseus slew the wooers in his halls. Knowest thou, Eperitus, that when thou stoodest yonder on the board in the Place of Banquets, when the great bow twanged and the long shafts hailed down the hall and loosened the knees of many, not a little was I put in mind of the song of the slaying of the wooers at the hands of Odysseus. The fame of Odysseus has wandered far—ay, even to Khem." And she looked straight at him.

The Wanderer darkened his face and put the matter by. He had heard something of that tale, he said, but deemed it a minstrel's feigning. One man could not fight a hundred, as the story went.

The Queen half rose from the couch where she lay curled up like a glittering snake. Like a snake she rose and watched him with her melancholy eyes.

"Strange, indeed—most strange that Odysseus, Laertes' son, Odysseus of Ithaca, should not know the tale of the slaying of the wooers by Odysseus' self. Strange, indeed, thou Eperitus, who art Odysseus."

Now the neck of the Wanderer was in the noose, and well he knew it: yet he kept his counsel, and looked upon her vacantly.

"Men say that this Odysseus wandered years ago into the North, and that this time he will not come again. I saw him in the wars, and he was a taller man than I," said the Wanderer.

"I have always heard," said the Queen, "that Odysseus was double-tongued and crafty as a fox. Look me in the eyes, thou Wanderer, look me in the eyes, and I will show thee whether or not thou art Odysseus," and she leaned forward so that her hair well-nigh swept his brow, and gazed deep into his eyes.

Now the Wanderer was ashamed to drop his eyes before a woman's, and he could not rise and go; so he must needs gaze, and as he gazed his head grew strangely light and the blood quivered in his veins, and then seemed to stop.

"Now turn, thou Wanderer," said the voice of the Queen, and to him it sounded far away, as if there was a wall between them, "and tell me what thou seest."

So he turned and looked towards the dark end of the chamber. But presently through the darkness stole a faint light, like the first gray of the dawn, and now he saw a shape, like the shape of a great horse of wood, and behind the horse were

black square towers of huge stones, and gates, and walls, and houses. Now he saw a door open in the side of the horse, and the helmeted head of a man looked out warily. As he looked a great white star slid down the sky so that the light of it rested on the face of the man, and that face was his own! Then he remembered how he had looked forth from the belly of the wooden horse as it stood within the walls of Ilios, and thus the star had seemed to fall upon the doomed city, an omen of the end of Troy.

"Look again," said the voice of Meriamun from far away.

So once more he looked into the darkness, and there he saw the mouth of a cave, and beneath two palms in front of it sat a man and a woman. The yellow moon rose and its light fell upon a sleeping sea, upon tall trees, upon the cave, and the two who sat there. The woman was lovely, with braided hair, and clad in a shining robe, and her eyes were dim with tears that she might

never shed: for she was a Goddess, Calypso, the daughter of Atlas. Then in the vision the man looked up, and his face was weary, and worn and sick for home, but it was his own face.

Then he remembered how he had sat thus at the side of Calypso of the braided tresses, on that last night of all his nights in her wave-girt isle, the centre of the seas.

"Look once more," said the voice of Meriamun the Queen.

Again he looked into the darkness. There before him grew the ruins of his own hall in Ithaca, and in the courtyard before the hall was a heap of ashes, and the charred bones of men. Before the heap lay the figure of one lost in sorrow, for his limbs writhed upon the ground. Anon the man lifted his face, and behold! the Wanderer knew that it was his own face.

Then of a sudden the gloom passed away from the chamber, and once more his blood

surged through his veins, and there before him sat Meriamun the Queen, smiling darkly.

"Strange sights hast thou seen, is it not so, Wanderer?" she said.

"Yea, Queen, the most strange of sights. Tell me of thy courtesy how thou didst conjure them before my eyes."

"By the magic that I have, Eperitus, I above all wizards who dwell in Khem, the magic whereby I can read all the past of those—I love," and again she looked upon him; "ay, and call it forth from the storehouse of dead time and make it live again. Say, whose face was it that thou didst look upon—was it not the face of Odysseus of Ithaca, Laertes' son, and was not that face thine?"

Now the Wanderer saw that there was no escape. Therefore he spoke the truth, not because he loved it, but because he must.

"The face of Odysseus of Ithaca it was that

I saw before me, Lady, and that face is mine. I avow myself to be Odysseus, Laertes' son, and no other man."

The Queen laughed aloud. "Great must be my strength of magic," she said, "for it can strip the guile from the subtlest of men. Henceforth, Odysseus, thou wilt know that the eyes of Meriamun the Queen see far. Now tell me truly: what camest thou hither to seek?"

The Wanderer took swift counsel with himself. Remembering that dream of Meriamun of which Rei the Priest had told him, and which she knew not that he had learned, the dream that showed her the vision of one whom she must love, and remembering the word of the dead Hataska, he grew afraid. For he saw well by the token of the spear point that he was the man of her dream, and that she knew it. But he could not accept her love, both because of his oath to Pharaoh and because of her whom Aphrodite had shown to him in Ithaca, her whom

alone he must seek, the Heart's Desire, the Golden Helen.

The strait was desperate, between a broken oath and a woman scorned. But he feared his oath, and the anger of Zeus, the God of hosts and guests. So he sought safety beneath the wings of truth.

"Lady," he said, "I will tell thee all! I came to Ithaca from the white North, where a curse had driven me; I came and found my halls desolate, and my people dead, and the very ashes of my wife. But in a dream of the night I saw the Goddess whom I have worshipped little, Aphrodite of Idalia, whom in this land ye name Hathor, and she bade me go forth and do her will. And for reward she promised me that I should find one who waited me to be my deathless love."

Meriamun heard him so far, but no further, for of this she made sure, that *she* was the woman whom Aphrodite had promised to the

Wanderer. Ere he might speak another word she glided to him like a snake, and like a snake curled herself about him. Then she spoke so low that he rather knew her thought than heard her words:

“Was it indeed so, Odysseus? Did the Goddess indeed send thee to seek me out? Know, then, that not to thee alone did she speak. I also looked for thee. I also waited the coming of one whom I should love. Oh, heavy have been the days, and empty was my heart, and sorely through the years have I longed for him who should be brought to me. And now at length it is done, now at length I see him whom in my dream I saw,” and she lifted her lips to the lips of the Wanderer, and her heart, and her eyes, and her lips said “Love.”

But it was not for nothing that he bore a stout and patient heart, and a brain unclouded by danger, or by love. He had never been in a strait like this; caught with bonds that no sword

could cut, and in toils that no skill could undo. On one side were love and pleasure—on the other a broken oath, and the loss for ever of the Heart's Desire. For to love another woman, as he had been warned, was to lose Helen. But again, if he scorned the Queen—nay, for all his hardihood he dared not tell her that she was not the woman of his vision, the woman he came to seek. Yet even now his cold courage and his cunning did not fail him.

“Lady,” he said, “we both have dreamed. But if thou didst dream thou wert my love, thou didst wake to find thyself the wife of Pharaoh. And Pharaoh is my host and hath my oath.”

“I woke to find myself the wife of Pharaoh,” she echoed, wearily, and her arms uncurled from his neck and she sank back on the couch. “I am Pharaoh's wife in word, but not in deed. Pharaoh is nothing to me, thou Wanderer—nought save a name.”

“Yet is my oath much to me, Queen Meriamun

—my oath and the hospitable hearth,” the Wanderer made answer. “I swore to Menepthah to hold thee from all ill, and there’s an end.”

“And if Pharaoh comes back no more, what then, Odysseus?”

“Then will we talk again. And now, Lady, thy safety calls me to visit thy Guard.” And without more words he rose and went.

The Queen looked after him.

“A strange man,” she said in her heart, “who builds a barrier with his oath betwixt himself and her he loves and has wandered so far to win! Yet methinks I honour him the more. Pharaoh Menepthah, my husband, eat, drink, and be merry, for this I promise thee—short shall be thy days.”

CHAPTER V.

THE CHAPEL PERILOUS.

“SWIFT as a bird or a thought,” says the old harper of the Northern Sea. The Wanderer’s

thoughts in the morning were swift as night birds, flying back and brooding over the things he had seen and the words he had heard in the Queen's chamber. Again he stood between this woman and the oath which, of all oaths, was the worst to break. And, indeed, he was little tempted to break it, for though Meriamun was beautiful and wise, he feared her love and he feared her magic art no less than he feared her vengeance if she were scorned. Delay seemed the only course. Let him wait till the King returned, and it would go hard but he found some cause for leaving the city of Tanis, and seeking through new adventures the World's Desire. The mysterious river lay yonder. He would ascend the river of which so many tales were told. It flowed from the land of the blameless Æthiopians, the most just of men, at whose tables the very Gods sat as guests. There, perchance, far up the sacred stream, in a land where no wrong ever came, there, if the Fates permitted, he might find the Golden Helen.

If the Fates permitted: but all the adventure was of the Fates, who had shown him to Meriamun in a dream.

He turned it long in his mind and found little light. It seemed that as he had drifted through darkness across a blood-red sea to the shores of Khem, so he should wade through blood to that shore of Fate which the Gods appointed.

Yet after a while he shook sorrow from him, arose, bathed, anointed himself, combed his dark locks, and girded on his golden armour. For now he remembered that this was the day when the Strange Hathor should stand upon the pylon of the temple and call the people to her, and he was minded to look upon her, and if need be to do battle with that which guarded her.

So he prayed to Aphrodite that she would help him, and he poured out wine to her and waited; he waited, but no answer came to his prayer. Yet as he turned away it chanced that

he saw his countenance in the wide golden cup whence he had poured, and it seemed to him that it had grown more fair and lost the stamp of years, and that his face was smooth and young as the face of that Odysseus who, many years ago, had sailed in the black ships and looked back on the smoking ruins of windy Troy. In this he saw the hand of the Goddess, and knew that if she might not be manifest in this land of strange Gods, yet she was with him. And, knowing this, his heart grew light as the heart of a boy from whom sorrow is yet a long way off, and who has not dreamed of death.

Then he ate and drank, and when he had put from him the desire of food he arose and girded on the sword, Euryalus's gift, but the black bow he left in its case. Now he was ready and about to set forth when Rei the Priest entered the chamber.

"Whither goest thou, Eperitus?" asked Rei the instructed Priest. "And what is it that has

made thy face so fair, as though many years had been lifted from thy back?"

"'Tis but sweet sleep, Rei," said the Wanderer, "Deeply I slept last night, and the weariness of my wanderings fell from me, and now I am as I was before I sailed across the blood-red sea into the night."

"Sell thou the secret of this sleep to the ladies of Khem," answered the aged priest, smiling, "and little shalt thou lack of wealth for all thy days."

Thus he spake as though he believed the Wanderer, but in his heart he knew that the thing was of the Gods.

The Wanderer answered:

"I go up to the Temple of the Hathor, for thou dost remember it is to-day that she stands upon the pylon brow and calls the people to her. Comest thou also, Rei?"

"Nay, nay, I come not, Eperitus. I am old indeed, but yet the blood creeps through these

withered veins, and, perchance, if I came and looked, the madness would seize me also, and I too should rush on to my slaying. There is a way in which a man may listen to the voice of the Hathor, and that is to have his eyes blindfolded, as many do. But even then he will tear the bandage from his eyes, and look, and die with the others. Oh, go not up, Eperitus—I pray thee go not up. I love thee—I know not why—and am little minded to see thee dead. Though, perchance,” he added, as though to himself, “it would be well for those I serve if thou wert dead, thou Wanderer, with the eyes of Fate.”

“Have no fear, Rei,” said the Wanderer, “as it is doomed so shall I die and not otherwise. Never shall it be told,” he murmured in his heart, “that he who stood in arms against Scylla, the Horror of the Rock, turned back from any form of fear or from any shape of Love.”

Then Rei wrung his hands and went nigh to weeping, for to him it seemed a pitiful thing that so goodly a man and so great a hero should thus be done to death. But the Wanderer passed out through the city, and Rei went with him for a certain distance. At length they came to the road set on either side with sphinxes, that leads from the outer wall of brick to the garden of the Temple of Hathor, and down this road hurried a multitude of men of all races and of every age. Here the prince was borne along in his litter; here the young noble travelled in his chariot. Here came the slave bespattered with the mud of the fields; here the cripple limped upon his crutches; and here was the blind man led by a hound. And with each man came women: the wife of the man, or his mother, or his sisters, or she to whom he was vowed in marriage. Weeping they came, and with soft words and clinging arms they strove to hold back him whom they loved.

“Oh, my son! my son!” cried a woman, “hearken to thy mother’s voice. Go not up to look upon the Goddess, for if thou dost look then shalt thou die, and thou alone art left alive to me. Two brothers of thine I bore, and behold, both are dead; and wilt thou die also, and leave me, who am old, alone and desolate? Be not mad, my son, thou art the dearest of all; ever have I loved thee and tended thee. Come back, I pray—come back.”

But her son heard not and heeded not, pressing on toward the Gates of the Heart’s Desire.

“Oh, my husband, my husband!” cried another, young, of gentle birth, and fair, who bare a babe on her left arm and with the right clutched her lord’s broidered robe. “Oh, my husband, have I not loved thee and been kind to thee, and wilt thou still go up to look upon the deadly glory of the Hathor? They say she wears the beauty of the Dead. Lovest thou me not

better than her who died five years ago, Merisa the daughter of Rois, though thou didst love her first? See, here is thy babe, thy babe, but one week born. Even from my bed of pain I have risen and followed after thee down these weary roads, and I am like to lose my life for it. Here is thy babe, let it plead with thee. Let me die if so it must be, but go not thou up to thy death. It is no Goddess whom thou wilt see, but an evil spirit loosed from the underworld, and that shall be thy doom. Oh, if I please thee not, take thou another wife and I will make her welcome, only go not up to thy death!"

But the man fixed his eyes upon the pylon tops, heeding her not, and at length she sank upon the road, and there with the babe would have been crushed by the chariots, had not the Wanderer borne her to one side of the way.

Now, of all sights this was the most dreadful, for on every side rose the prayers and lamenta-

tions of women, and still the multitude of men pressed on unheeding.

"Now thou seest the power of Love, and how if a woman be but beautiful enough she may drag all men to ruin," said Rei the Priest.

"Yes," said the Wanderer; "a strange sight, truly. Much blood hath this Hathor of thine upon her hands."

"And yet thou wilt give her thine, Wanderer."

"That I am not minded to do," he answered; "yet I will look upon her face, so speak no more of it."

Now they were come to the space before the bronze gates of the pylon of the outer court, and there the multitude gathered to the number of many hundreds. Presently, as they watched, a priest came to the gates, that same priest who had shown the Wanderer the bodies in the baths of bronze. He looked through the bars and cried aloud:

"Whoso would enter into the court and look

upon the Holy Hathor let him draw nigh. Know ye this, all men, the Hathor is to him who can win her. But if he pass not, then shall he die and be buried within the temple, nor shall he ever look upon the sun again. Of this ye are warned. Since the Hathor came again to Khem, of men seven hundred and three have gone up to win her, and of bodies seven hundred and two lie within the vaults, for of all these men Pharaoh Menephtah alone hath gone back living. Yet there is place for more! Enter, ye who would look upon the Hathor!"

Now there arose a mighty wailing from the women. They clung madly about the necks of those who were dear to them, and some clung not in vain. For the hearts of many failed them at the last, and they shrank from entering in. But a few of those who had already looked upon the Hathor from afar, perchance a score in all, struck the women from them and rushed up to the gates.

"Surely thou wilt not enter in?" quoth Rei, clinging to the arm of the Wanderer. "Oh, turn thy back on death and come back with me. I pray thee turn."

"Nay," said the Wanderer, "I will go in."

Then Rei the Priest threw dust upon his head, wept aloud, and turned and fled, never stopping till he came to the Palace, where sat Meriamun the Queen.

Now the priest unbarred a wicket in the gates of bronze, and one by one those who were stricken of the madness entered in. For all of these had seen the Hathor many times from afar without the wall, and now they could no more withstand their longing. And as they entered two other priests took them by the hand and bound their eyes with cloths, so that unless they willed it they might not see the glory of the Hathor, but only hear the sweetness of her voice. But two there were who would not be blindfolded, and of these one was that man whose

wife had fainted by the way, and the other was a man sightless from his youth. For although he might not see the beauty of the Goddess, this man was made mad by the sweetness of her voice. Now, when all had entered in, save the Wanderer, there was a stir in the crowd, and a man rushed up. He was travel-stained, he had a black beard, black eyes, and a nose hooked like a vulture's beak.

"Hold!" he cried. "Hold! Shut not the gates! Night and day have I journeyed from the host of the Apura who fly into the wilderness. Night and day I have journeyed, leaving wife and flocks and children and the Promise of the Land, that I may once more look upon the beauty of the Hathor. Shut not the gates!"

"Pass in," said the priest, "pass in, so shall we be rid of one of those whom Khem nurtured up to rob her."

He entered; then, as the priest was about to bar the wicket, the Wanderer strode forward,

and his golden armour clashed beneath the portal.

"Wouldst thou indeed enter to thy doom, thou mighty lord?" asked the priest, for he knew him well again.

"Ay, I enter; but perchance not to my doom," answered the Wanderer. Then he passed in and the brazen gate was shut behind him.

Now the two priests came forward to bind his eyes, but this he would not endure.

"Not so," he said; "I am come here to see what may be seen."

"Go to, thou madman, go to! and die the death," they answered, and led all the men to the centre of the courtyard whence they might see the pylon top. Then the priests also covered up their eyes and cast themselves at length upon the ground; so for a while they lay, and all was silence within and without the court, for they waited the coming of the Hathor. The Wanderer glanced through the bars of bronze at the

multitude gathered there. Silent they stood with upturned eyes, even the women had ceased from weeping and stood in silence. He looked at those beside him. Their bandaged faces were lifted and they stared towards the pylon top as though their vision pierced the cloths. The blind man, too, stared upward, and his pale lips moved, but no sound came from them. Now at the foot of the pylon lay a little rim of shadow. Thinner and thinner it grew as the moments crept on towards the perfect noon. Now there was but a line, and now the line was gone, for the sun's red disc burned high in the blue heaven straight above the pylon brow. Then suddenly and from far there came a faint sweet sound of singing, and at the first note of the sound a great sigh went up through the quiet air, from all the multitude without. Those who were near the Wanderer sighed also, and their lips and fingers twitched, and he himself sighed, though he knew not why.

Nearer came the sweet sound of singing, and stronger it swelled, till presently those without the temple gate who were on higher ground caught sight of her who sang. Then a hoarse roar went up from every throat, and madness took them. On they rushed, dashing themselves against the gates of bronze and the steep walls on either side, and beat upon them madly with their fists and brows, and climbed on each other's shoulders, gnawing at the bars with their teeth, crying to be let in. But the women threw their arms about them and screamed curses on her whose beauty brought all men to madness.

So it went for a while, till presently the Wanderer looked up, and lo! upon the pylon's brow stood the woman's self, and at her coming all were once more silent. She was tall and straight, clad in clinging white, but on her breast there glowed a blood-red ruby stone, fashioned like a star, and from it fell red drops that stained for one moment the whiteness of her robes, and then

the robe was white again. Her golden hair was tossed this way and that, and shone in the sunlight, her arms and neck were bare, and she held one hand before her eyes as though to hide the brightness of her beauty. For, indeed, she could not be called beautiful but Beauty itself.

And they who had not loved saw in her that first love whom no man has ever won, and they who had loved saw that first love whom every man has lost. And all about her rolled a glory—like the glory of the dying day. Sweetly she sang a song of promise, and her voice was the voice of each man's desire, and the heart of the Wanderer thrilled in answer to it as thrills a harp smitten by a cunning hand; and thus she sang:

Whom hast thou longed for most,
True love of mine?
Whom hast thou loved and lost?
Lo, she is thine!

She that another wed
Breaks from her vow;

She that hath long been dead
Wakes for thee now.

Dreams haunt the hapless bed,
Ghosts haunt the night,
Life crowns her living head,
Love and Delight.

Nay, not a dream nor ghost,
Nay, but Divine,
She that was loved and lost
Waits to be thine!

She ceased, and a moan of desire went up
from all who heard.

Then the Wanderer saw that those beside
him tore at the bandages about their brows and
rent them loose. Only the priests who lay upon
the ground stirred not, though they also moaned.

And now again she sang, still holding her
hand before her face:

Ye that seek me, ye that sue me,
Ye that flock beneath my tower,
Ye would win me, would undo me,
I must perish in an hour,

Dead before the Love that slew me, clasped the
Bride and crushed the flower.

Hear the word and mark the warning,
Beauty lives but in your sight,
Beauty fades from all men's scorning
In the watches of the night,
Beauty wanes before the morning, and
Love dies in his delight.

She ceased, and once more there was silence.
Then suddenly she bent forward across the pylon
brow so far that it seemed that she must fall,
and stretching out her arms as though to clasp
those beneath, showed all the glory of her love-
liness.

The Wanderer looked, then dropped his eyes
as one who has seen the brightness of the noon-
day sun. In the darkness of his mind the world
was lost, and he could think of naught save the
clamour of the people, which fretted his ears.
They were all crying, and none were listening.

"See! see!" shouted one. "Look at her hair;

it is dark as the raven's wing, and her eyes—they are dark as night. Oh, my love! my love!”

“See! see!” cried another, “were ever skies so blue as those eyes of hers, was ever foam so white as those white arms?”

“Even so she looked whom once I wed many summers gone,” murmured a third, “even so when first I drew her veil. Hers was that gentle smile breaking like ripples on the water, hers that curling hair, hers that child-like grace.”

“Was ever woman so queenly made?” said a fourth. “Look now on the brow of pride, look on the deep, dark eyes of storm, the arched lips, and the imperial air. Ah, here indeed is a Goddess meet for worship.”

“Not so I see her,” cried a fifth, that man who had come from the host of the Apura. “Pale she is and fair, tall indeed, but delicately shaped, brown is her hair, and brown are her great eyes like the eyes of a stag, and ah, sadly she looks upon me, longing for my love.”

"My eyes are opened," screamed the blind man at the Wanderer's side. "My eyes are opened, and I see the pylon tower and the splendid sun. Love hath touched me on the eyes and they are opened. But lo! not one shape hath she but many shapes. Oh, she is Beauty's self, and no tongue may tell her glory. Let me die! let me die, for my eyes are opened. I have looked on Beauty's self! I know what all the world journeys on to seek, and why we die and what we go to find in death."

CHAPTER VI.

THE WARDENS OF THE GATE.

THE clamour swelled or sank, and the men called and cried the names of many women, some dead, some lost. Others were mute, silent in the presence of the World's Desire, silent as when we see lost faces in a dream. The Wanderer had looked once and then cast down his

eyes and stood with his face hidden in his hands. He alone waited and strove to think; the rest were abandoned to the bewilderment of their passions and their amaze.

What was it that he had seen? That which he had sought his whole life long; sought by sea and land, not knowing what he sought. For this he had wandered with a hungry heart, and now was the hunger of his heart to be appeased? Between him and her was the unknown barrier and the invisible Death. Was he to pass the unmarked boundary, to force those guarded gates and achieve where all had failed? Had a magic deceived his eyes? Did he look but on a picture and a vision that some art could call again from the haunted place of Memory?

He sighed and looked again. Lo! in his charmed sight a fair girl seemed to stand upon the pylon brow, and on her head she bore a shining urn of bronze.

He knew her now. He had seen her thus

at the court of King Tyndareus as he drove in his chariot through the ford of Eurotas; thus he had seen her also in the dream on the Silent Isle.

Again he sighed and again he looked. Now in his charmed sight a woman sat, whose face was the face of the girl, grown more lovely far, but sad with grief and touched with shame.

He saw her and he knew her. So he had seen her in Troy towers when he stole thither in a beggar's guise from the camp of the Achæans. So he had seen her when she saved his life in Ilios.

Again he sighed and again he looked, and now he saw the Golden Helen.

She stood upon the pylon's brow. She stood with arms outstretched, with eyes upturned, and on her shining face there was a smile like the infinite smile of the dawn. Oh, now indeed he knew the shape that was Beauty's self—the innocent Spirit of Love sent on earth by the un-

dying Gods to be the doom and the delight of men; to draw them through the ways of strife to the unknown end.

Awhile the Golden Helen stood thus looking up and out to the worlds beyond; to the peace beyond the strife, to the goal beyond the grave. Thus she stood while men scarce dared to breathe, summoning all to come and take that which upon the earth is guarded so invincibly.

Then once more she sang, and as she sang, slowly drew herself away, till at length nothing was left of the vision of her save the sweetness of her dying song.

Who wins his Love shall lose her,
Who loses her shall gain,
For still the spirit woos her,
A soul without a stain;
And Memory still pursues her
With longings not in vain!

He loses her who gains her,
Who watches day by day
The dust of time that stains her,
The griefs that leave her gray,

The flesh that yet enchains her
Whose grace hath passed away!

Oh, happier he who gains not
The Love some seem to gain:
The Joy that custom stains not
Shall still with him remain,
The loveliness that wanes not,
The Love that ne'er can wane.

In dreams she grows not older
The lands of Dream among,
Though all the world wax colder,
Though all the songs be sung,
In dreams doth he behold her
Still fair and kind and young.

Now the silence died away, and again madness came upon those who had listened and looked. The men without the wall once more hurled themselves against the gates, while the women clung to them, shrieking curses on the beauty of the Hathor, for the song meant nothing to these women, and their arms were about those whom they loved and who won them their bread. But most of the men who were in the outer

court rushed up to the inner gates within which stood the alabaster shrine of the Hathor. Some flung themselves upon the ground and clutched at it, as in dreams men fling themselves down to be saved from falling into a pit that has no bottom. Yet as in such an evil slumber the dreamer is drawn inch by inch to the mouth of the pit by an unseen hand, so these wretched men were dragged along the ground by the might of their own desire. In vain they set their feet against the stones to hold themselves from going, for they thrust forward yet more fiercely with their hands, and thus little by little drew near the inner gates writhing forwards yet moving backwards like a wounded snake dragged along by a rope. For of those who thus entered the outer court and looked upon the Hathor, few might go back alive.

Now the priests drew the cloths from their eyes, and rising, flung wide the second gates, and there, but a little way off, the veil of the

shrine wavered as if in a wind. For now the doors beyond the veil were thrown open, as might be seen when the wind swayed its Tyrian web, and through the curtain came the sound of the same sweet singing.

“Draw near! Draw near!” cried the ancient priest. “Let him who would win the Hathor draw near!”

Now at first the Wanderer was minded to rush on. But his desire had not wholly overcome him, nor had his wisdom left him. He took counsel with his heart and waited to let the others go, and to see how it fared with them.

The worshippers were now hurrying back and now starting onwards, as fear and longing seized them, till the man who was blind drew near, led by the hand of a priest, for his hound might not enter the second court of the temple.

“Do ye fear?” he cried. “Cowards, I fear not. It is better to look upon the glory of the Hathor and die than to live and never see her

more. Set my face straight, ye priests, set my face straight, at the worst I can but die."

So they led him as near the curtains as they dared to go and set his face straight. Then with a great cry he rushed on. But he was caught and whirled about like a leaf in a wind, so that he fell. He rose and again rushed on, again to be whirled back. A third time he rose and rushed on, smiting with his blind man's staff. The blow fell, and stayed in mid-air, and there came a hollow sound as of a smitten shield, and the staff that dealt the blow was shattered. Then there was a noise like the noise of clashing swords, and the man instantly sank down dead, though the Wanderer could see no wound upon him.

"Draw near! Draw near!" cried the priest again. "This one is fallen. Let him who would win the Hathor draw near!"

Then the man who had fled from the host of the Apura rushed forward, crying on the Lion

of his tribe. Back he was hurled, and back again, but at the third time once more there came the sound of clashing swords, and he too fell dead.

"Draw near! Draw near!" cried the priest. "Another has fallen! Let him who would win the Hathor draw near!"

And now man after man rushed on, to be first hurled back and then slain of the clashing swords. And at length all were slain save the Wanderer alone.

Then the priest spake:

"Wilt thou indeed rush on to doom, thou glorious man? Thou hast seen the fate of many. Be warned and turn away."

"Never did I turn from man or ghost," said the Wanderer, and drawing his short sword he came near, warily covering his head with his broad shield, while the priests stood back to see him die. Now, the Wanderer had marked that none were touched till they stood upon the very threshold of the doorway. Therefore he uttered

a prayer to Aphrodite and came on slowly till his feet were within a bow's length of the threshold, and there he stood and listened. Now he could hear the very words of the song that the Hathor sang as she wove at her loom. So dread and sweet it was that for a while he thought no more on the Guardians of the Gate, nor of how he might win the way, nor of aught save the song. For she was singing shrill and clear in his own dear tongue, the tongue of the Achæans:

Paint with threads of gold and scarlet, paint the battles
fought for me,
All the wars for Argive Helen; storm and sack by land or
sea;
All the tale of loves and sorrows that have been and are
to be.

Paint her lips that like a cup have pledged the lips of
heroes all,
Paint her golden hair unwhitened while the many winters
fall,
Paint the beauty that is mistress of the wide world and its
thrall!

Paint the storms of ships and chariots, rain of arrows fly-
ing far,
Paint the waves of Warfare leaping up at Beauty like a
star,
Like a star that pale and trembling hangs above the waves
of War.

Paint the ancient Ilios fallen; paint the flames that scaled
the sky,
When the foe was in the fortress, when the trumpet and
the cry
Rang of men in their last onset, men whose hour had
dawned to die.

Woe for me once loved of all men, me that never yet have
known
How to love the hearts that loved me. Woe for me, who
hear the moan
Of my lovers' ghosts that perished in their cities over-
thrown.

Is there not, of Gods or mortals, oh, ye Gods, is there not
one—
One whose heart shall mate with my heart, one to love ere
all be done,
All the tales of wars that shall be for my love beneath the
sun?

Now the song died away, and the Wanderer
once more bethought him of the Wardens of the

Gate and of the battle which he must fight. But as he braced himself to rush on against the unseen foe the music of the singing swelled forth again, and whether he willed it or willed it not, so sweet was its magic that there he must wait till the song was done. And now stronger and more gladly rang the sweet shrill voice, like the voice of one who has made moan through the livelong winter night, and now sees the chariot of the dawn climbing the eastern sky. And thus the Hathor sang:

Ah, within my heart a hunger for the love unfelt, un-
known,
Stirs at length, and wakes and murmurs as a child that
wakes to moan,
Left to sleep within some silent house of strangers and
alone.

So my heart awakes, and waking, moans with hunger and
with cold,
Cries in pain of dim remembrance for the joy that was of
old;
For the love that was, that shall be, half forgot and half
foretold.

Have I dreamed it or remembered? In another world
was I,
Lived and loved in alien seasons, moved beneath a golden
sky,
In a golden clime where never came the strife of men that
die.

But the Gods themselves were jealous, for our bliss was
over great,
And they brought on us division, and the horror of their
Hate,
And they set the Snake between us, and the twining coils
of Fate.

And they said, "Go forth and seek each other's face, and
only find
Shadows of that face ye long for, dreams of days left far
behind,
Love the shadows and be loved with loves that waver as
the wind."

Once more the sweet singing died away, but
as the Wanderer grasped his sword and fixed
the broad shield upon his arm he remembered
the dream of Meriamun the Queen, which had
been told him by Rei the Priest. For in that
dream twain who had sinned were made three,

and through many deaths and lives must seek each other's face. And now it seemed that the burden of the song was the burden of the dream.

Then he thought no more on dreams, or songs, or omens, but only on the deadly foe that stood before him wrapped in darkness, and on Helen, in whose arms he yet should lie, for so the Goddess had sworn to him in sea-girt Ithaca. He spoke no word, he named no God, but sprang forward as a lion springs from his bed of reeds; and, lo! his buckler clashed against shields that barred the way, and invisible arms seized him to hurl him back. But no weakling was the Wanderer, thus to be pushed aside by magic, but the stoutest man left alive in the whole world now that Aias, Telamon's son, was dead. The priests wondered as they saw how he gave back never a step, for all the might of the Wardens of the Gate, but lifted his short sword and hewed down so terribly that fire leapt

from the air where the short sword fell, the good short sword of Euryalus the Phæacian. Then came the clashing of the swords, and from all the golden armour that once the god-like Paris wore, ay, from buckler, helm, and greaves, and breastplate the sparks streamed up as they stream from the anvil of the smith when he smites great blows on swords made white with fire.

Swift as hail fell the blows of the unseen blades upon the golden armour, but he who wore it took no harm, nor was it so much as marked with the dint of the swords. So while the priests wondered at this miracle the viewless Wardens of the Gate smote at the Wanderer, and the Wanderer smote at them again. Then of a sudden he knew this, that they who barred the path were gone, for no more blows fell, and his sword only cut the air.

Then he rushed on and passed behind the veil and stood within the shrine.

But as the curtains swung behind him the

singing rose again upon the air, and he might not move, but stood fixed with his eyes gazing where, far up, a loom was set within the shrine. For the sound of the singing came from behind the great web gleaming in the loom, the sound of the song of Helen as she heard the swords clash and the ringing of the harness of those whose knees were loosened in death. It was thus she sang:

Clamour of iron on iron, and shrieking of steel upon steel,
Hark how they echo again!
Life with the dead is at war, and the mortals are shaken
and reel,
The living are slain by the slain!

Clamour of iron on iron; like music that chimes with a
song,
So with my life doth it chime,
And my footsteps must fall in the dance of Erinnyes, a revel
of wrong,
Till the day of the passing of Time!

Ghosts of the dead that have loved me, your love have
been vanquished of death,
But unvanquished of death is your hate;

Say, is there none that may woo me and win me of all that
draw breath,
Not one but is envied of Fate?

Now the song died, and the Wanderer looked up, and before him stood three shadows of mighty men clad in armour. He gazed upon them, and he knew the blazons painted on their shields; he knew them for heroes long dead—Pirithous, Theseus, and Aias.

They looked upon him, and then cried with one voice:

“Hail to thee, Odysseus of Ithaca, son of Laertes!”

“Hail to thee,” cried the Wanderer, “Theseus, Ægeus’ son! Once before didst thou go down into the House of Hades, and alive thou camest forth again. Hast thou crossed yet again the stream of Ocean, and dost thou live in the sunlight? For of old I sought thee and found thee not in the House of Hades.”

The semblance of Theseus answered: “In the

House of Hades I abide this day, and in the fields of asphodel. But that thou seest is a shadow, sent forth by the Queen Persephone, to be the guard of the beauty of Helen."

"Hail to thee, Pirithous, Ixion's son," cried the Wanderer again. "Hast thou yet won the dread Persephone to be thy love? And why doth Hades give his rival holiday to wander in the sunlight, for of old I sought thee, and found thee not in the House of Hades."

Then the semblance of Pirithous answered:

"In the House of Hades I dwell this day, and that thou seest is but a shadow which goes with the shadow of the hero Theseus. For where he is am I, and where he goes I go, and our very shadows are not sundered; but we guard the beauty of Helen."

"Hail to thee, Aias, Telamon's son," cried the Wanderer. "Hast thou not forgotten thy wrath against me, for the sake of those accursed arms that I won from thee, the arms of Achilles,

son of Peleus? For of old in the House of Hades I spoke to thee, but thou wouldst not answer one word, so heavy was thine anger."

Then the semblance of Aias made answer: "With iron upon iron, and the stroke of bronze on bronze, would I answer thee, if I were yet a living man and looked upon the sunlight. But I smite with a shadowy spear and slay none but men foredoomed, and I am the shade of Aias who dwells in Hades. Yet the Queen Persephone sent me forth to be the guard of the beauty of Helen."

Then the Wanderer spake.

"Tell me, ye shadows of the sons of heroes, is the way closed, and do the Gods forbid it, or may I that am yet a living man pass forward and gaze on that ye guard, on the beauty of Helen?"

Then each of the three nodded with his head, and smote once upon his shield, saying:

"Pass by, but look not back upon us, till thou hast seen thy desire."

Then the Wanderer went by, into the innermost chamber of the alabaster shrine.

Now when the shadows had spoken thus, they grew dim and vanished, and the Wanderer, as they had commanded, drew slowly up on the alabaster shrine, till at length he stood on the hither side of the web upon the loom. It was a great web, wide and high, and hid all the innermost recesses of the shrine. Here he waited, not knowing how he should break in upon the Hathor.

As he stood wondering thus his buckler slipped from his loosened hand and clashed upon the marble floor, and as it clashed the voice of the Hathor took up the broken song; and thus she sang ever more sweetly:—

Ghosts of the dead that have loved me, your love has been
vanquished by Death,

But unvanquished by Death is your Hate;

Say, is there none that may woo me and win me of all that
draw breath,

Not one but is envied of Fate?

None that may pass you unwounded, unscathed of invisible
spears—

By the splendour of Zeus there is one,
And he comes, and my spirit is touched as Demeter is
touched by the tears
Of the Spring and the kiss of the sun!

For he comes, and my heart that was chill as a lake in the
season of snow,
Is molten, and glows as with fire.
And the Love that I knew not is born and he laughs in my
heart, and I know
The name and the flame of Desire.

As a flame am I kindled, a flame that is blown by a wind
from the North,
By a wind that is deadly with cold,
And the hope that awoke in me faints, for the Love that is
born shall go forth
To my Love, and shall die as of old!

Now the song sobbed itself away, but the
heart of the Wanderer echoed to its sweetness
as a lyre moans and thrills when the hand of
the striker is lifted from the strings.

For a while he stood thus, hidden by the
web upon the loom, while his limbs shook like

the leaves of the tall poplar, and his face turned white as turn the poplar leaves. Then desire overcame him, and a longing he could not master, to look upon the face of her who sang, and he seized the web upon the loom, and rent it with a great rending noise, so that it fell down on either side of him, and the gold coils rippled at his feet.

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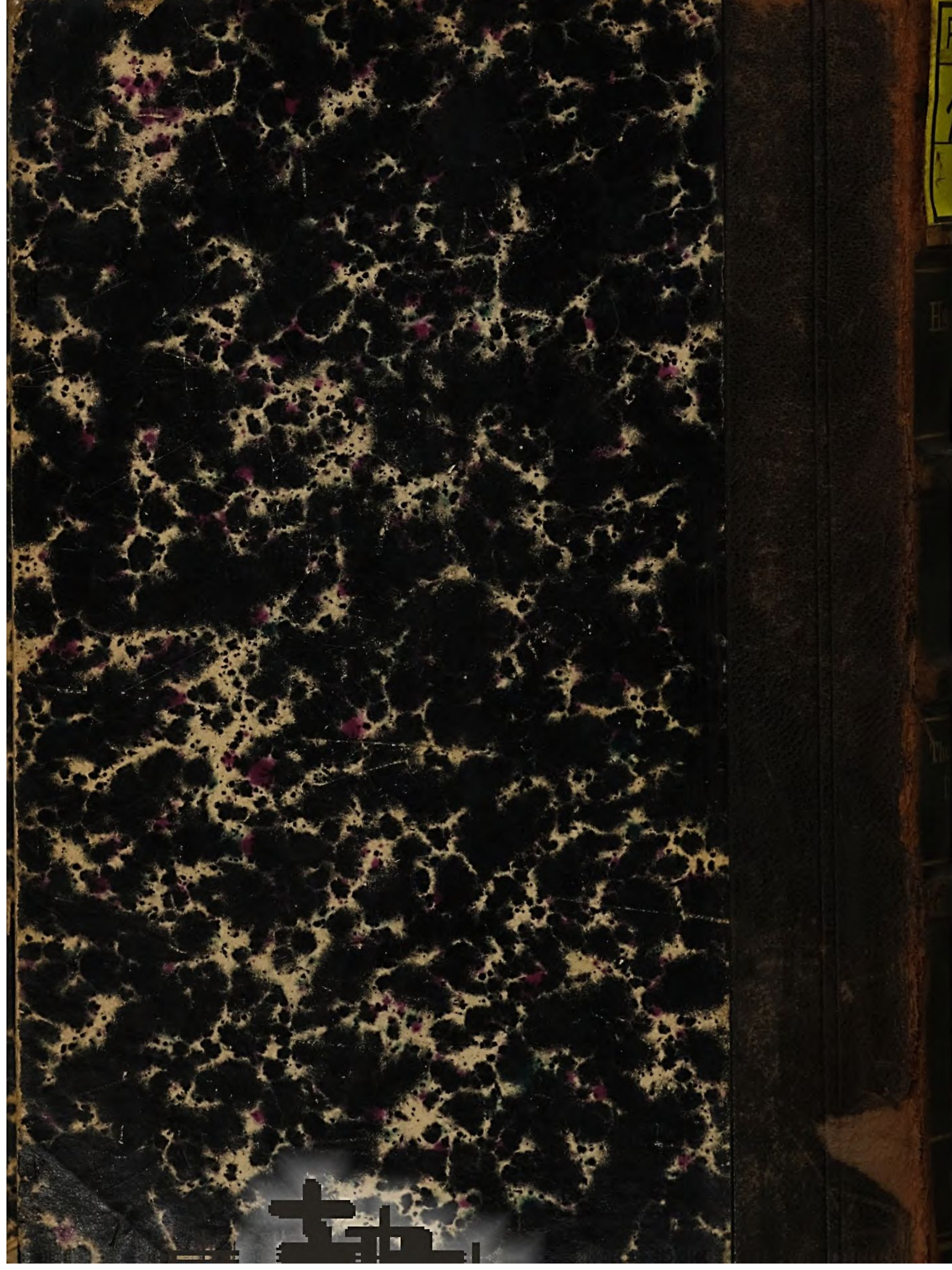
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